

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Wednesday 31 October 2001
(*Afternoon*)

Session 1

£5.00

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Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 31 October 2001

(Afternoon)

[THE DEPUTY PRESIDING OFFICER *opened the meeting at 14:30*]

Time for Reflection

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): Good afternoon. The first item of business is time for reflection, which is led today by Mrs Ravinder Kaur Nijjar.

Mrs Ravinder Kaur Nijjar (Member of the Executive Committee of the Scottish Inter-faith Council, Primary School Teacher and Voluntary Community Worker in Glasgow): Waheguru ji ka Khalsa. Waheguru ji ki Fateh.

On 11 September 2001, the world stopped as the horrific events in America unfolded in front of everyone's eyes and left a deep and lasting impression of incredulity and sadness.

What distressed and horrified me further, however, were the attacks that followed on innocent Sikhs and Muslims—people who were going about their daily business having to suffer violence and hatred because of their appearance and their faith.

Do people in the wider community not know who Sikhs are and what their beliefs are, or the basic beliefs of other faith communities? If not, why not? What can we do to change that?

The 10th Guru, Guru Gobind Singh ji, who gave Sikhs their present physical and spiritual identity said:

"Manas Ki jat sabai ekai pahchanbo."

"Recognise ye the whole human race as one."

Children and adults should realise that, as there are many different languages in the world, so there are different names for God:

"Koi bolay Ram Ram, Koi Khuddai
Koi Gusain, Koi Allahe."

"Some call Him Ram, Some Khuddah
Some serve Him as Gusain and some as Allah."

But there is only one God. Our paths are different as to how we reach him and pray to him:

"Avall Allah noor upaiyaa
kudrat kay sabh bunday
Ek noor tay sabh jug upaiyaa
Kaun balay kau munday."

"First, God created his light and
From its power all men are made

From God's light came the whole universe
so, whom shall we call good and whom bad?"

Those of us who have faith must not allow it to be used as a weapon by a few who use religion to justify their own positions of power. Ego creates fundamentalism. We must build bridges between faith communities and to do that we must have interfaith dialogue. We must have a place where we can meet, look at issues, develop materials and information on faiths and disseminate those widely. An interfaith centre in Scotland is vital, especially after the events of 11 September.

We need to look at our common, shared values and develop mutual understanding and respect. Education about different faiths for all is essential. It is because of ignorance that we form attitudes about others who look and behave differently from us. Education alleviates ignorance.

As I watch television, I see violence and animosity between people of the same faith and of different faiths. I see walls being built, dividing communities, and I wonder where it will end.

We cannot let differences divide us. You who represent the people cannot allow walls to be built between communities. You must help to tear down existing walls, break down barriers and help faith communities to communicate with each other.

As a member of the Sikh faith, I have been taught that the whole of humanity is one family and that every human should be honoured, not in terms of his birth, colour, creed or caste, but as a human, for the good deeds that he does. Every Sikh, when concluding their daily prayers, will ask God to bless the whole of humanity:

"Nanak Naam Churdhi Kala
Teray bhanay sarbatt da bhala."

"Sayeth Nanak through the ever increasing glory of thy
name
May the whole of mankind enjoy thy blessing."

As adults we have a human responsibility to help build bridges that will allow people to cross barriers and unite mankind. We must do that—we owe it to future generations—if there is to be lasting peace and harmony in the world.

Asylum Seekers and Refugees

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): The next item of business is a debate on motion S1M-2377, in the name of Jackie Baillie, on asylum seekers and refugee integration, and two amendments to that motion.

14:35

The Minister for Social Justice (Jackie Baillie): Just last month, we debated the issue of asylum seekers and refugees at Paul Martin's instigation. I am very pleased to have the opportunity to speak on this important and sensitive issue in more depth today. In light of current world affairs, it is clear that the refugee situation is not going to ease.

The UK—and Scotland as part of the UK—has a part to play in welcoming and supporting those who are fleeing oppression and persecution. It is worth remembering that some of that terror and persecution is beyond the scope of our experience and understanding. We have a long and proud tradition of welcoming asylum seekers to our country and I believe that everyone in the chamber wants that to continue.

It is clear, as I have seen at first hand, that a significant amount of good work is going on in communities. However, that does not mean that we can be complacent. The difficulties encountered in communities that are welcoming asylum seekers are complex and multifaceted. The challenges of integrating refugees and supporting asylum seekers require a co-ordinated range of responses. As a result, it is critical that we work together, in partnership with local authorities, voluntary organisations and the communities themselves to achieve that aim. We must draw upon the extensive good work already under way, share experiences and learn from our mistakes.

The tragic events at Sighthill have acted as a catalyst for reconsideration of the situation of asylum seekers and refugees within Scotland and indeed the UK. Since then, a dedicated unit has been set up in the Executive to develop our responsibilities for the devolved aspects of the issue. The unit will primarily have a co-ordination role to ensure that services such as health, education, police and social work are able to support new arrivals, as well as maintain their existing standard of service for the resident population. I will say more about each of those services later.

It is also essential that we have effective liaison with colleagues in Whitehall on reserved aspects of immigration and asylum policy. To that end, I have already had discussions with George

Foulkes, the Minister of State at the Scotland Office, and Lord Rooker, who has ministerial responsibility for asylum seekers and refugees at the Home Office.

As members will be aware, David Blunkett made a statement in the House of Commons on Monday. That statement represents an important step in the development of UK policy on asylum seekers and sets out a comprehensive package. The proposals have a number of implications for Scotland, which we are clarifying and pursuing as we continue to work closely with our counterparts in Whitehall to influence the shape of the white paper.

I very much welcome the package of measures that the Home Secretary announced. We have all heard horror stories of the wrong people arriving off coaches in Glasgow with the wrong information to hand and, as a result, the necessary support services are not readily available. The establishment of induction centres to ensure that asylum seekers have a complete assessment of all their needs before being dispersed will ensure that such situations will not be repeated.

Mr Kenneth Gibson (Glasgow) (SNP): I note that the minister welcomes the package of measures that Mr Blunkett introduced. However, was the minister consulted on those measures, and if so, when?

Jackie Baillie: If Kenny Gibson had been listening, he would know that I have had discussions with George Foulkes and Lord Rooker. If he will let me continue, he will find out how they have taken on some of the concerns that have been expressed, not just by the Executive, but by the Parliament.

Many people are concerned about the impact that the Home Secretary's statement will have on areas such as Glasgow, which has been at the forefront of welcoming asylum seekers to Scotland. Let me be quite clear: dispersal stays. For the national asylum support service, it is business as usual. Glasgow City Council's contract remains, and I encourage other local authorities to share the responsibility by welcoming asylum seekers to their areas.

I also welcome the progressive removal of the voucher system. Not only was the system stigmatising and degrading; the benefit was paid at a very low level. That has now been uprated, and I welcome the increase in cash from £10 to £14, which is what was previously paid. The smart cards will also provide for automated cash transactions. That will start to address the situations that we have heard about, in which no change was given to asylum seekers and they lost the benefit of their voucher. The card may also be used more imaginatively in future, as a way of

accessing other support. We will feed in members' views to Whitehall.

Shona Robison (North-East Scotland) (SNP): Will the minister give way?

Jackie Baillie: I will make further progress and then take an intervention.

We will also be interested to learn from the outcome of the pilot accommodation centres—a model that is used successfully throughout Europe. Three centres will be trialled, with a comprehensive range of services provided on site. That is clearly a much more robust and useful measure than simply abandoning asylum seekers, on their arrival, to substandard bed-and-breakfast accommodation, which is what is happening in the south-east of England.

I am especially delighted that the Home Secretary has responded positively to representations from the Scottish Executive and others that immigration appeals should be heard in Scotland. As the Home Secretary said:

"The system should be geared effectively towards ensuring that we take the service out; that is what we are doing in the appeals and support process in Scotland".—[*Official Report, House of Commons*, 29 October 2001; Vol 373, c 636.]

Overall, the Home Secretary has put together a robust package that strikes the right balance between treating asylum seekers with dignity and respect and speeding up the process.

In taking our work forward, I gave a commitment during the previous debate to adopt best practice and to develop an action plan. However, before doing so it is important for us to listen and learn. I have had the opportunity to meet a number of key people, from asylum seekers in Sighthill and throughout Glasgow to representatives of the statutory agencies, including Glasgow City Council and the Scottish Refugee Council. Those discussions are extremely valuable in helping us to build up a true picture of what is happening on the ground—where the strengths and weaknesses are—and how we can develop a sustainable strategy for the future.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton (Lothians) (Con): Does the Home Secretary's statement about induction centres and accommodation centres apply only to future asylum seekers or to any of those in Scotland, such as those who are presently in Sighthill? It would be a great help if the minister could tell us what the position is.

Jackie Baillie: I shall make a distinction between the two. Induction centres are for asylum seekers on arrival, so that we get the mix of services right before dispersal. The accommodation centres that the Government intends to trial will be part of the dispersal process: they will be the second stage, after induction.

Clearly, there needs to be a long-term mix of facilities, and the Home Secretary has made it clear that he wants to learn from what works, in the interests of both a speedy process and the asylum seeker.

If we are to achieve the successful integration of refugees into our towns and cities, it is essential that there is broad ownership of the agenda. We will achieve that by working closely with the Scottish Refugee Council, local authorities and others to build dialogue with asylum seekers, refugees and their host communities.

In addition, I am pleased to announce the establishment of the Scottish refugee integration forum, which I will chair. Its remit will be to consider all matters required to assist refugees to integrate into life in Scotland; to feed into the national refugee integration forum, based on experience in Scotland, ways in which the UK Government strategy that is set out in the document "Full and equal citizens" might be developed and improved over time; to collect and disseminate good practice from around the country; to play a key role in promoting positive images of refugees as members of our society; and to make recommendations, in partnership with the Scottish Executive and in consultation with the wider public and voluntary sector interests, on the action necessary to enable the successful integration of refugees in Scotland and to provide more accessible, co-ordinated and good-quality services.

Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP): I endorse and welcome the moves towards greater integration. However, does the minister accept that the criticism that has been levelled by a couple of the agencies that are responsible for integration—Strathclyde police and Greater Glasgow Primary Care NHS Trust—is that they do not receive specific funding in relation to the increased responsibilities that they have as a result of the presence of asylum seekers? Does the minister agree that it is time to recognise that there should be increased specific funding in order that already strained budgets are not strained even further by those extra burdens?

Jackie Baillie: I will come to the contribution of the police and the health service, which has been tremendous, later in my speech. I understand that applications for additional assistance from Strathclyde police and Greater Glasgow Primary Care NHS Trust have been received by the Executive and are in the process of being considered. Hopefully, there will be an outcome shortly.

To be members of the core group of the new Scottish refugee integration forum, we intend to invite Sally Daghlán, who is the chief executive of the Scottish Refugee Council; Professor David

Walsh, who is the dean of the health faculty at Glasgow Caledonian University, chair of the National Refugee Forum and fellow trustee of the Scottish Refugee Council; and a representative from the Commission for Racial Equality. Additional members with expertise in issues relating to refugees will be invited to participate. Central to their work will be on-going dialogue with refugees themselves.

In addition, the Executive has already taken direct action aimed at helping communities under stress in Glasgow. When the First Minister and I visited Sighthill in Glasgow on 19 September, we announced a funding package of £700,000 to the city's social inclusion partnerships, channelled through the Glasgow alliance.

Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab):

Will the minister assure the organisations and asylum seekers in my constituency, where many asylum seekers are housed in areas that could be described as areas of deprivation, but which do not make up part of a SIP, that they will not be neglected when funding and other support is given to asylum seekers in Glasgow?

Jackie Baillie: I want to put on record my tribute to the work that is being done in Maryhill, where a number of the voluntary sector organisations in particular provide a warm welcome for asylum seekers. I can tell the member that Glasgow City Council has decided to provide additional funding—to the sum of £20,000, I believe—for non-SIP areas, which include Maryhill, Pollokshaws and Govanhill.

The extra resources will be used to increase provision for the community in child care, advice and support, language development, community integration and translation and interpretation services. They will be used to benefit the whole community as well as asylum seekers and refugees across the city.

I am sure that all those activities will lead to improvements in the quality of life in communities across Glasgow. We must find ways of bringing people together and of breaking down any barriers which might separate them. That process has already started in Glasgow—it was started by people in communities such as Sighthill, Pollok, Toryglen and Castlemilk.

Police forces across Scotland, particularly in Strathclyde, are working hard to provide reassurance and advice to our asylum seeker community in response to racist incidents and wider community tensions. Many established lines of communication have been enhanced and new partnerships have been forged and developed with local resident groups as well as with asylum seekers. I pay tribute to the work of Strathclyde police.

Racist attacks on individuals, organisations, premises or groups have no place in Scotland in the 21st century. We have made it clear that those attacks will not be tolerated. The police will continue to monitor the situation and are fully prepared and ready to respond.

We must create an environment where racism does not exist. That is what we are seeking to do by introducing our forthcoming anti-racism campaign. In recent months we have carried out a wide-ranging consultation exercise with many different groups of people throughout Scotland to get their perceptions of and concerns about racism in Scotland. The results were startling and in some cases they were, frankly, shocking. They confirmed that there is a need to increase quickly our understanding and awareness of the issue. We are now considering the execution of the campaign and I will announce further details in due course.

At a time like this we should be stamping out racial abuse; we should be celebrating the diversity of cultures in Scotland. We must send out the clear message that racist abuse has no place in the new Scotland.

I turn now to two fundamental issues—health and education. Access to good quality health care is a key element of our strategy to support asylum seekers. Asylum seekers very often come with a backlog of health problems, having had little or no medical treatment earlier in their lives. Lack of medical records and history means that practice staff, general practitioners and dentists need to spend a huge amount of time with asylum seekers basically just working out what they need.

All that means that there is a need to plan services in a much more integrated way. I pay tribute again to the achievements of Greater Glasgow Health Board through its primary care trust. It has managed its resources to reflect highly localised needs and pressures. We must learn from the systematic and sensitive way in which it has responded to a new situation.

There is no doubt that everyone in the chamber knows that education is the gateway to opportunity and to achieving social justice. Schools are at the heart of preparing young people to live in a multicultural and inclusive society. Schools and education authorities therefore have a vital role in ensuring equality of opportunity for all of our pupils.

Our duty is to create a safe and inclusive learning environment and a society that understands, respects and values cultural richness and diversity.

Bruce Crawford (Mid Scotland and Fife)

(SNP): I am interested in that subject. As the minister is talking about equality of support, I would like to find out what her reaction is to a briefing from Save the Children, which was passed to MSPs. It mentions the problem of

“insufficient money for school trips, bus fares for activities, entrance money for leisure centres.”

Jackie Baillie: The First Minister and I visited a school in Sighthill in which we saw exactly the opposite: considerable support was being provided to asylum seekers’ children. There was a good integration package and language development needs as well as wider social and educational issues were being catered for effectively.

I will continue, as I am conscious that I am rapidly running out of time. Children of asylum seekers who are in pre-school education or child care are treated in the same way as other children who are resident in Scotland. At the moment, local authorities have the power to provide pre-school education for three and four-year-old children who live in their area. From April next year, they will have a duty to secure such education either at their own hand or in partnership with other providers.

We recognise that it is important for asylum seekers to be able to speak the language of the country. Many further education colleges have built up expertise in teaching people who do not have English as their first language, so it is natural that many asylum seekers find themselves looking in that direction.

We were pleased to respond to the recent upsurge in demand for language support. We did so just a few weeks ago, with new money to provide for that increased demand, which is helping colleges offer courses and extra support, on top of the record resources that we are already investing in further and higher education.

We recognise that we must take a flexible and broad-based approach, meeting need wherever it arises and not just through the colleges. We are also tackling the barriers that are making it difficult for asylum seekers to access basic language skills. For example, we are introducing further arrangements to provide, through the colleges, extra help with transport and books. We are enabling FE colleges, where they consider the circumstances to be appropriate, to accept asylum seekers on part-time vocational FE courses. For the asylum seekers who are given leave to remain, many of whom bring with them valuable skills and professional experience, the breaking down of those barriers allows them to make a more immediate contribution to Scotland’s economy through those skills.

On legal services, there were problems in the past surrounding the so-called “substantive” interview with immigration officials, which has previously been held often in Croydon, but also in Liverpool. I am delighted that David Blunkett has agreed with us and that interviews will now take place in Scotland.

The Law Society of Scotland has taken action to alert the legal profession to a range of issues that must be borne in mind when it provides advice to asylum seekers. As members may recall, Scottish ministers recently agreed to commence part V of the Legal Aid (Scotland) Act 1986, which allows the Scottish Legal Aid Board to embark on a pilot project through which solicitors can directly supply much needed legal services to asylum seekers in Castlemilk and Sighthill. I think that that shows the commitment of the Executive and other bodies to improving the legal services provided to asylum seekers in Scotland.

I conclude by reaffirming our commitment to working in partnership with the public sector, the private sector, the voluntary sector, the host communities and, most importantly, the asylum seekers and refugees themselves. Our joint aim is to build understanding, to improve dialogue and to provide more accessible, co-ordinated and good-quality services to welcome and support asylum seekers and to enable refugees to become full and equal citizens.

Scotland has a reputation as a fair, caring and tolerant nation, with a long tradition of welcoming asylum seekers. We will ensure that that reputation is upheld.

I move,

That the Parliament welcomes the Scottish Executive’s commitment to work in partnership with the public, private and voluntary sectors to welcome and integrate asylum seekers and refugees to Scotland and further welcomes the Executive’s commitment to build improved dialogue with asylum seekers and refugees and host communities and, through partnership working, enable the provision of more accessible, co-ordinated and good quality services, protection from the threat of racist attacks and harassment, and the sharing of good practice to assist the integration of refugees.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Several members whom I would expect to speak in the debate are not showing on my screen. If members wish to participate, they should press their request-to-speak buttons now.

14:58

Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP): As the Minister for Social Justice has just said, we have a tradition of welcoming to our country and into our communities people from around the world—indeed, I myself am a product of that tradition, as are many others in the chamber. We

should not forget that, in the course of our country's history, although long ago, we have also suffered repression and forced emigration to other shores. We, from this country, were indeed asylum seekers. From time to time, it has been the unfortunate position that people who have come to live here have been fleeing repression or mistreatment in other nations. We have been a safe haven to which they have turned in their time of need.

We in Scotland have been very lucky, in that many of those who have come to our shores have chosen to remain here and have enriched our society and culture. We still have space. Scotland is not full up. We know that our population is falling and that we are heading for a skills shortage, which can in some way be met through continuing our tradition of welcoming new Scots who have the skills that our society requires.

A short time ago, an English Tory MP said that Britain was in danger of becoming a mongrel nation. There was uproar and calls for that MP's resignation; there was outrage that he should be saying such things. I also remember William McIlvanney telling a rally in Glasgow that Scotland was a mongrel nation. He was cheered for that, because the Scots in the audience were—and are—happy that we are indeed a mongrel nation, with the benefits to all of us that that brings.

We should strive to accept our fellow human beings into our midst and to treat all as we would want to be treated. Similar sentiments were expressed in this chamber at the official opening of the Parliament in 1999:

"That man to man, the world o'er
Shall brithers be for a' that."

That is a fine aspiration which we should be at the forefront of promoting.

For that reason, I want today to praise the work that the Executive and this Parliament have done recently. It is true that ministers were initially reluctant to act against the dictates of Westminster, but once they were on their way they went willingly enough. The work that has been done recently in Glasgow is a testament to the Scots attitude that I mentioned a few moments ago. One indication of that attitude was the appointment of Jackie Baillie as minister with special responsibility for asylum seekers, which indicated that this country was prepared to do whatever it can to aid and assist those who are forced to flee their countries. I congratulate the minister on her appointment and the First Minister on having the courage to insist that this post was needed in Scotland.

Because of Jackie Baillie's appointment, we have now begun to take steps to deliver at least a semblance of social justice to asylum seekers in

Scotland. I welcome the funding for a law centre to help asylum seekers in Glasgow, the funding for language skills and services, the extra money that has been made available to social inclusion partnerships and today's announcement of the Scottish refugee integration forum. We all know that much of the work should have been done before the asylum seekers arrived in Scotland, but it is being done now. My SNP colleagues and I welcome the work that is being done to integrate asylum seekers into the host communities. It is not yet enough, but it has begun and it is a step in the right direction. I urge the minister and the Executive to continue thinking along those lines and to continue seeking ways in which to help asylum seekers and the communities of Scotland. I know that the minister will do that, because I have faith in her belief in social justice. I ask her to carry it forward with renewed vigour.

As we have heard today, too often this world slips into crisis. Too often we are faced with the sight of large numbers of people being repressed, tortured, bombed out of their workplaces and homes, or subjected to genocide. We must not fail to continue on the particularly Scottish path of social justice and egalitarianism. This country can and must play its part in ameliorating the suffering of asylum seekers and refugees. We can and must stand with the international community in seeking to find homes for asylum seekers. We can and must have an internationalist outlook, rather than the narrow, inward-looking politics of the fortress.

That is why our amendment to the minister's motion regrets the moves made on Monday by her London colleagues. The statement that David Blunkett made on Monday at Westminster suggested a shift into the shadows of insularity and isolationism—a step into the narrows. He made it clear that he wanted to send a signal to people throughout the world

"that the United Kingdom is not a soft touch."—[*Official Report, House of Commons*, 29 October 2001; Vol 373, c 627.]

That was language straight from the mouth of Ann Widdecombe. Not only was it the language of the dark, but the new policy of the new Labour Government echoes some of the worst fears of those of us who believe in social justice and humanity. No longer are we to be allowed to welcome asylum seekers into our communities. Instead, they will be locked up in camps. I have heard people make the defence that that is being done for their own safety. What an indictment of the so-called democratic society that new Labour is fond of talking about and of claiming to promote.

Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con): Does Linda Fabiani recognise that, in coming to the conclusions that he has reached, David Blunkett is

acknowledging the pressure that is being put on him by other countries in Europe? France, in particular, has accused us of providing too many facilities to immigrants. I stress that I am talking about immigrants, not asylum seekers or refugees.

Linda Fabiani: I suggest that David Blunkett has spent too much time listening to Tory policies and to the worst of the tabloid press.

Mr Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab) *rose*—

Trish Godman (West Renfrewshire) (Lab): Will the member take an intervention?

Linda Fabiani: I welcome the Government's commitment to cease keeping asylum seekers in mainstream prisons. We should be ashamed that Greenock and Cornton Vale prisons have for years been used in that way. The commitment that has been made would be welcome if the Home Secretary were not setting up special prisons for asylum seekers. I know that he says that they are for reception and accommodation rather than detention, but if it looks like a prison, feels like a prison and acts like a prison, it is a prison, no matter what it is called and how much spin is put on it—a prison is a prison.

Where the Scottish people accept asylum seekers into our communities and the Scottish Government works to ensure full integration, the Westminster Government wants to introduce isolation. Where the Scottish Parliament wants to deliver social justice to asylum seekers, the Home Secretary wants to introduce social exclusion.

In the Home Secretary's statement, he did not introduce the stigmatisation of prison alone, as asylum seekers will also be required to carry identity cards, which no one else in Scotland will be expected to carry.

Mr McNeil: Will the member give way?

Linda Fabiani: No, thank you.

Mr Blunkett wants to call those identity cards smart cards, but they will carry a photograph and the fingerprints of the asylum seeker. These so-called smart cards are supposedly for monitoring purposes, but asylum seekers are being asked to wear a badge to show that they are not part of our country. ID cards are a potent symbol of difference. Asylum seekers' movements are to be monitored and those who carry the cards will have to live in camps. We are in great danger of levering our country away from libertarian social democracy and moving sharply towards the right.

Jackie Baillie: I am deeply concerned about issues of factual accuracy. I simply note that all MSPs carry ID cards.

Would Linda Fabiani care to comment on the fact that Denmark and Holland, both progressive

European countries, are following a similar course to that of the UK? Indeed, they set the trail. Why does the SNP constantly need to be inward looking, seeing everything through a constitutional prism, rather than being outward looking? Will the member share with the chamber the SNP's immigration policy?

Linda Fabiani: I will not dignify that prepared speech with any kind of response. I do not carry an identity card. The Executive expects asylum seekers to carry identity cards and to declare their difference and their non-integration to the rest of the country.

Where Scotland would extend the hand of friendship and our Minister for Social Justice has tried to ensure that some measure of human dignity remains with asylum seekers, London would have us treat them as potential or actual criminals for daring to flee persecution. If some poor unfortunate refuses to take their place in one of those camps, perhaps fearing a return to the circumstances from which they only recently escaped, Mr Blunkett knows exactly how to deal with them. He said:

"Those refusing to take up such a place would disqualify themselves from support."—[*Official Report, House of Commons*, 29 October 2001; Vol 373, c 628.]

Where is the understanding of different circumstances? Where is the instinct to protect human dignity? Where is the determination to fulfil our international obligations on human rights?

Even more than that, the Home Secretary wants to change the process through which asylum seekers can appeal. Grounds for appeal will be limited to a point of law—there will be no real right of appeal—and detention places will be doubled in the centres that have now been dubbed secure removal centres, but that are nothing more or less than deportation centres. I have been to Dungavel and I have seen the barbed wire.

When I first heard the Westminster statement, I felt that a few small rays of hope remained. I was glad to hear that the processing system will be bolstered and speeded up, which should help lessen the stress felt by asylum seekers as they await a ruling. However, that hope was slightly soiled by the cutting back of the appeals process. Some lightening of the heart was also to be gained from the proposal to speed up the integration of refugees after the authorities have ruled in their favour. However, that was destroyed by the move to keep asylum seekers away from communities and by the intention to remove them with the same speed and with a reduced appeal process.

At first, I also thought that the socially divisive and degrading voucher system was being abolished—a moment of true pleasure, but only a moment. David Blunkett, in his statement,

suggested—only suggested—that vouchers were going. The man did not state categorically, as demanded by so many of his back benchers, “Vouchers are going.” If members take the time to read the explanatory notes to the statement, they will see that matters are even less clear.

Trish Godman: We are now 11 minutes and five seconds into Linda Fabiani’s speech. Can she please tell us what the SNP’s immigration policy is?

Linda Fabiani: This debate is not about immigration policy. The Executive set the agenda. Its motion is about the integration into Scotland of asylum seekers and refugees. Labour members want to change that agenda because they do not like what they are hearing, which goes against the grain of what the Scottish Executive is trying to do. The Executive is stymied once again by Westminster.

The common public perception is that the smart card, which is just as socially divisive and degrading, will be a kind of bank card that can be used in a limited number of retail outlets—a kind of electronic voucher system. It is only in reading the explanatory notes that the reality hits home. Point 6 of the explanatory notes states:

“Consideration is being given to the potential for automated credit transfer and other mechanisms”.

It is clear that the voucher system will be superseded by a more robust system, but surely we are entitled to know what is meant by a more robust system. What is proposed for asylum seekers who come to our country?

I know that there are Labour and Liberal Democrat members—even some Conservative members—who believe in social justice and that some of them have fought for the rights of asylum seekers and refugees for years. I know that there are members of the Labour party who want Scotland to play its full part in helping asylum seekers and refugees from around the world. I say to them that they should stand up for their principles and stand up for what they believe in. Some things should be beyond the cut and thrust of party politics: human dignity and human rights are among them. Support the SNP amendment. Demand that the powers of the Parliament enable us to send a message to the world that Scotland intends to fulfil its moral obligations—the obligations that we would face as an independent country.

I move amendment S1M-2377.2, to leave out from “and further welcomes” to end and insert:

“; congratulates the host communities and Scotland’s civic society on the steps taken so far to enable integration; welcomes the appointment of a Scottish Minister with responsibilities in this area; notes that the statement by the Home Secretary in the Westminster Parliament on 29

October 2001 indicates a move by Her Majesty’s Government contrary to the current direction of the Scottish Executive, particularly in the establishment of “accommodation centres” as opposed to sensitive dispersal and the imposition of “Smart Cards” as a form of electronic voucher for asylum seekers, and calls for the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Executive to welcome asylum seekers and refugees into our communities and to have the power to provide appropriate services to promote true integration.”

15:12

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton (Lothians) (Con): We must approach the subject of asylum seekers with compassion, humanity and respect for human dignity, especially for those who left their home with the threat of death hanging over them. Some elected representatives are descended from asylum seekers. In my case, one of my direct ancestors came to Scotland to avoid being executed by King Edward I. More recently, many members will be aware of the newsreel film of great columns of refugees being machine-gunned by the Luftwaffe, when the Third Reich was engaging in one blitzkrieg after another. Considerations of humanity played no part in the thinking of those responsible, but some of the worst perpetrators were later tried and executed for their crimes.

Today, we share life in a world in which communications are immediate and in which satellite photography and television have made it harder for outrages to be committed without the rest of the world knowing about them. It follows that those who are genuine refugees should be dealt with sympathetically, speedily and well. As it happens, when Sir Alec Douglas-Home was Foreign Secretary, he admitted from Uganda many thousands of Asian businessmen and their families, who were under threat of persecution from General Amin’s army. On the other hand, those who wish to improve their standard of living, who fall into the category of economic migrants, should go through standard immigration procedures.

I will make some recommendations to deal with the imperfections that arise in the present system. Given that some cases are taking more than two years to resolve, that on average less than a third of applicants receive asylum, and that only 10 per cent of all applicants go back to their country of origin, there seems to be scope for much greater efficiency and speed in dealing with all applications.

Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): Will the member give way?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I will give way in just a second.

If the system dealt with applications more

speedily, there would be no excuse for thousands of lost files. Remember that justice delayed can be justice denied. I hope that the minister will impress on her colleagues in the United Kingdom Government the need to take a swifter and less leisurely approach. I believe that promises to that effect have been made.

Robert Brown: Does Lord James accept that a significant number of refugees are refused permission to stay because of technical problems to do with the filling in of forms and so on? Such refusals are righted on appeal in due course.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: That may be absolutely correct, but I am saying that such matters must be dealt with objectively and far more speedily than at present. I do not think that that is in dispute.

My second recommendation is that the voucher system for asylum seekers should go as soon as is practicable. Asylum seekers cannot obtain change for a voucher. At a time when we are trying, as is appropriate, to have integration, many asylum seekers regard vouchers as a form of discrimination that sets them apart from the rest of the community.

Nick Hardwick, who is the chief executive of the Refugee Council, has said that vouchers

“stigmatise and demean asylum seekers, and make one of society’s most vulnerable groups even more exposed to potential hostility.”

The assurances that have been given on this issue are encouraging. We look forward to speedy progress.

Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP): If it were possible for this Parliament to achieve abolition of the voucher system—by repeal or amendment of the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968—would the Conservatives support a move by the Scottish Parliament to do so?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I appreciate the point that the member is making but what she suggests cannot be done. This is a reserved matter. It has to be dealt with by the UK Parliament.

However, there are issues that we are entitled to take up, and that leads me to my third point. The minister has already covered it to some extent. Sufficient resources should continue to be provided for the educational and social work needs of asylum seekers. I welcome the work that is being done and the minister’s assertion that education is the gateway to opportunity. It is important that the UK Government acknowledges the extra resource pressures that that entails and assists by making appropriate provision when the size of the block grant is considered. I hope that the minister will confirm that that matter is, or will

be, in hand.

I acknowledge—because there was a legitimate argument—that dispersal should not have taken place before there had been resolution of applications. Reception, accommodation or induction centre concepts should have been implemented at an earlier stage than they were. Nonetheless, the provision of relevant resources is a necessity.

My fourth point is this: I learn that more than 3,000 asylum seekers in Glasgow will be required, under the present system, to go to Croydon in London to have their applications processed. That is not good enough. The Home Office should have an office not just in Scotland but in Glasgow.

Trish Godman: That has been changed. People no longer have to go to Croydon.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Thank you for that clarification. I am most grateful that they will not have to do that. I suggest that having an office in Scotland is not enough; it should be in Glasgow.

Years ago, I had a problem with a pop group. They needed a licence to play overseas and they had to go all the way down to London to get it. I appealed to Willie Ross and he got the system changed so that they could get the licence in Glasgow instead. If Willie Ross could do it for me, I do not see why the present Government cannot do it for the minister. Dispersing a few civil servants should be no great hardship for them. There would be plenty of volunteers for such a posting in Glasgow; and having such an office in Glasgow would enable successful applicants to become established more quickly in the community of their destination. Allowing applicants to go to a local office for processing is less austere and much more convenient and friendly.

Fifthly, it appears from the Chhokar reports that there were substantial failings in the provision of interpretation facilities in that case. Adequate facilities should be provided for speakers of the languages concerned. Obviously, there will be fewer problems with providing interpreters when large numbers of people speak the same ethnic language. However, we are in danger of having minorities within minorities where small handfuls of people speak different languages without immediate access to interpretation facilities. It would be useful to know how many ethnic community languages are used in Scotland as the first language of the people concerned, and to know whether interpreters of those languages are available at present. I would be glad if the minister could impress on her colleagues in the British Government that it will make sense not only for asylum seekers to have access to the necessary interpreters but for the existence of ready access to interpreters to be fully taken into account in the

dispersal of asylum seekers.

I notice that the Home Secretary, in his wisdom, is suggesting citizenship classes. However, before he can put those in place satisfactorily, he will need to be certain that the necessary interpretation facilities are made available. I hope that he will consult on that issue in order to take account of all eventualities. If people settle in Britain as British citizens, they should have every opportunity to learn English, with a view to participating fully in our way of life.

Finally, I make reference to the proposed new law to ban religious as well as racial hatred. We want to know whether a specific offence of incitement to religious hatred will protect members of different faiths. We are aware of Martin Luther King's famous assertion that one cannot change people's hearts but one can prevent them from being heartless. The question arises as to whether current legislation is sufficient to deal with all known cases of incitement to religious violence. The onus of proof must be for the Administration to establish that reform would lead to an improvement in the situation. It is essential that, whatever Government is in power, Britain does not obtain a reputation as a soft touch for bogus asylum seekers.

Today, I make several recommendations, the most important of which are that applications need to be dealt with much more speedily, that vouchers be scrapped as soon as possible, that the necessary resources should be provided through local authorities for interpreters and that there should be a sufficiency of Home Office centres to deal with applications. In conclusion, the way in which we seek to proceed is by establishing a civilised, humane and effective system, the hallmark of which is fairness and justice for all concerned.

I move amendment S1M-2377.1, to leave out from first "welcomes" to end and insert:

"reaffirms the historic commitment of both Scotland and the United Kingdom as a whole to provide a safe haven for those who have been persecuted or are under threat of persecution by oppressive regimes overseas; notes, however, with concern that our ability to provide refuge for the genuinely oppressed is severely hampered by the problems associated with our asylum system, and welcomes the movement of Her Majesty's Government towards the policy of the Conservative Party, which will speed up the process of establishing which claims are well-founded and subsequently enable every possible step to be taken to welcome and integrate asylum seekers and refugees to Scotland and grant them the same rights of citizenship as enjoyed by the rest of the community."

15:22

Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): I want to begin by echoing Lord James's concluding comments on the need for speed and efficiency in the process,

which has been the bugbear for many years. There are problems in dealing with Croydon, such as administrative delays and difficulty in getting through on the telephone or in getting answers to letters. I did not hear much in the Home Secretary's statement to give me huge confidence that that aspect of the matter will change. Whatever view one takes on refugees, it must be fundamental that applications are processed quickly, that applicants' status is established and that we move on from there.

Today's debate takes place in the context of two things: the biggest movement of population around the world since the second world war and the heightened tensions that have been produced by the atrocities in America on 11 September. Both those factors are negative factors in providing a humane, tolerant and welcoming approach to refugees from appalling regimes throughout the world. However, we should also listen to warnings about taking a tabloid, black-and-white view of the many complexities in policy in relation to and management of asylum issues.

John Donne said:

"No man is an Island".

Of course, the United Kingdom is an island and not infrequently has an island mentality. However, every aspect of the issue has strands that connect our society in Scotland to issues abroad.

I recently had the pleasure of attending a multicultural evening in my constituency. It was attended by many people from different ethnic minority backgrounds who are citizens or settled residents. During the course of the evening we discussed many topics and it was immediately evident that the slant that is taken on the war and the allied bombings of Afghanistan is fundamentally different among those who have their origins, or who have friends or family in other countries, particularly Pakistan. My purpose in mentioning that is not to argue the relative merits or otherwise of the air war. I do so to make the point that that is something that could easily polarise opinion in this country, and that polarisation of opinion along ethnic or religious lines creates its own problems, particularly if Governments develop—in an atmosphere of war and fear—any form of intolerance to other views.

It is true that

"No man is an Island".

That means that we must welcome refugees who are washed up on our shores as a result of events in other countries. Some of those refugees might be economic migrants, have political agendas or have come into the UK illegally. However, at the end of the day, all that means is that there are men, women and children who have a desire to

get on in the world—we all have that desire—and who want to hold a variety of political, religious and individual views, which is our right as individual human beings. One must be pretty desperate to come into the United Kingdom on the underside of a Eurostar train, in the hold of an aeroplane or in a sealed lorry container.

Liberal Democrats strongly welcome the Executive motion. It might not reach the high points of literary style, but it does set the proper objectives and—more important—the proper tone and image, because the key words in it are “welcome”, “integrate”, “partnership” and “good practice”. I will return to those in a minute, but I would like to say a word about David Blunkett’s announcements earlier this week. They are certainly an advance on the discredited asylum system that was operated by his predecessor Jack Straw or, for that matter, by the previous Conservative Government. However, in an echo of Linda Fabiani’s comments, I must say that the tone in which he introduced the measures to the House of Commons was distinctly different to the tone and fairness that Jackie Baillie used when introducing the motion. In that context, I welcome Jackie Baillie’s approach.

The ending of the voucher system is unqualified good news and is something that Liberal Democrats have called for since the system was introduced, but it remains to be seen whether the replacement smart card will be different. Most people do not pay for their bread, milk and daily newspapers with smart cards. Will there be access to cash machines? Will the cards be just a more modern stigmatising method of support for refugees? Crucially, vouchers are not being abolished—they are being phased out, which means that refugees will continue for some time yet to be stigmatised by them.

The proposed system of induction, accommodation and removal centres—pilot scheme though it might be—is as yet vague in detail. The Liberal Democrats have no strong objection to offering short-term accommodation in induction centres for a few weeks, but I do not share Jackie Baillie’s confidence that the arrangements will eliminate the organisational mishaps that we have seen so often, such as people being put on the wrong bus. More significant is the fact that longer-term accommodation centres are a different ball game. They might be administratively convenient, but there are significant risks, which will depend on how the centres are dealt with. The most significant risk is that such centres will become the long-term solution. They might be better than the bed-and-breakfast accommodation that is offered to refugees in certain parts of south-east England, but they will probably not be better than the Sighthill-type provision in Glasgow, difficult though

its origin was and bearing in mind the fact that it was a bit of an organisational mess when it was first available.

The real issue is delay—be it six months, 12 months, 18 months or even 24 months—which Lord James Douglas-Hamilton touched on. It is welcome that interviews will take place in Scotland. I am interested to know whether the Minister for Social Justice knows when those interviews will begin and when local offices will be provided. When and if that happens, it will make a significant difference to the set-up.

Jackie Baillie: In order to be helpful, I understand that people are in the process of examining office space as we speak.

Robert Brown: That is a welcome development.

It is appropriate, in turning to the role of the Parliament, to join the welcome that has been given to Jackie Baillie’s appointment as the minister who has responsibility for asylum seekers. If there is anybody in the Parliament who characterises a welcoming attitude to refugees, it must be Jackie Baillie. Members would accept that sentiment.

One of the themes of the issue is integration. That does not mean tolerance, or talking about “them over there”, it means people becoming part of our society in Scotland. A series of things could be done to help bring that about. For example, I heard a good suggestion from Citizens Advice Scotland, which I wish to share with members, who will be aware of my background in that sphere. CAS proposes that advantages could be gained if it was in a position to make use of suitably qualified asylum seekers—being able to speak English would obviously be helpful—and had some resources to back such people up. First, it would build confidence among asylum seekers, who would be doing something that is useful to mainstream Scottish society. Secondly, such people could make use of their particular skills and perspectives by being advisers to people from other countries and who have particular problems.

Thirdly, they would be noticed and be seen to be involved with local communities in Scotland through giving advice to people who are already here. As Linda Fabiani and Jackie Baillie said, many people who come from abroad have significant qualifications. Those people are assets to the country and use should be made of their skills. Citizens Advice Scotland’s suggestion is therefore interesting. People who come through the citizens advice bureaux, with their well-established mechanisms for improving people’s training and knowledge, will have considerably greater knowledge and more acquaintance with the situation in Scotland and the skills that they need to integrate into Scottish society.

I will touch on one or two matters in the time that remains to me. Issue has rightly been made of the liberating power of the English language, which allows people to play a full part in society. That is right and it must be given top priority. I am not so sure about citizenship classes; such classes have other overtones. However, that issue could be considered from another viewpoint. Citizens in our society who come from other ethnic backgrounds have a natural desire to keep in touch with their roots. In the same way as we have encouraged Gaelic-medium education in Scotland, we should make a case for Urdu-medium classes. That is particularly true if people from immigrant communities and ethnic minority communities are to be encouraged to regard the state education system as their education system.

I have a point about legal services. I have a little knowledge of that subject and have had meetings to discuss it with the Law Society of Scotland and other groups. I welcome the pilot schemes under part V of the Legal Aid (Scotland) Act 1986, but technical obstacles to full use of the existing expertise remain. Use of such expertise is currently limited in Scotland because of the previous non-history of that kind of thing. We ought to make best use of the few non-legally qualified immigration advisers in Scotland and ensure that there are not in the legal aid system obstacles to encouraging those who have an interest and aptitude in this sphere to get involved. There are difficulties in that.

I return to the words of our time for reflection speaker, who spoke in moving and worthwhile terms that served as an introduction to the debate. She spoke about seeing

"walls being built, dividing communities",

and asked where that would end. We in the Parliament must, in partnership with institutions of Government and voluntary sector organisations, bend every sinew to build not walls, but bridges. We must not merely receive asylum seekers, but welcome and integrate them and ensure that they, like all other residents of this country, are treated as individuals rather than numbers, and that they are welcome to play their full part in contributing to the future of our society.

With those sentiments in mind, I beg to support the Executive motion.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move now to open debate. If speeches are about four minutes long, all members who want to speak should be able to do so.

15:33

Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): As the first speaker within the shortened time for

speeches, I hope members will forgive me if I do not take the leisurely stroll around the issues that we have had so far. My speech will perhaps be something of a breathless canter and I apologise for that in advance.

This is a serious debate and we have a responsibility to all who are involved to ensure that we focus on how best to deliver proper services and opportunities for real integration in safe communities. I know that many members in the chamber, regardless of their party, want to do that. However, in response to Linda Fabiani, I contend that we do that not because of our Scottishness, but because of our humanity and compassion. It is dangerous to imply that we are motivated by our Scottishness, because we then exclude all those throughout the United Kingdom who are as committed as we are to making this a friendly and welcoming country.

It is also important in the context of our experience to avoid using Sighthill as a kind of shorthand for issues concerning asylum seekers and refugees. We must do that first because the people in Sighthill do not deserve to be characterised en masse as racist and hostile. That is especially so when we reflect on the work that has been done by many people in that community—and by local agencies and the local council—towards Sighthill becoming a welcoming community. I say again to Linda Fabiani that, no matter how much respect I have for Jackie Baillie, that work was done before Jackie Baillie took up her appointment. We do people a disservice if we imply that it was only when we became involved that things got moving. A lot of good local people have been doing a lot of work for a long time, which should be valued.

I make that point also because asylum seekers and refugees are settled throughout Glasgow, not least in my constituency of Pollok. I receive positive messages about an excellent initiative that the local authority, the voluntary sector, the churches and other agencies are taking. In my area, people are working together and are determined to ensure that proper support is provided, simply because they want their communities to be safe for the new Scots who join us, and not because there is anything in it for them.

Linda Fabiani: Does the member accept that although that great work was done by all sorts of people long before the Parliament existed, such work must be backed up by resources? The Parliament and the Executive were a bit dilatory in working out what financial and other resources were required from the top down.

Johann Lamont: That was not the point that Linda Fabiani made in her speech. Resources are an issue, but understanding the problems would

help with directing resources.

I welcome the Minister for Social Justice's agreement to visit my constituency to mark the significance of the work that I described.

We must ensure that our powers are used fully, to the benefit of local communities. We all have a responsibility to concentrate our minds on how we use the powers that we have.

The context has been changed by the announcement on UK policy. I will not rush to judgment on what has been said. It is worth noting that the Social Justice Committee took evidence on asylum seekers' experiences. I am sure that we all welcome the ending of the voucher scheme. Allowing people to work provides more positive opportunities for people in our communities.

Several options are being piloted. If local organisations, groups and people who are involved say that the pilots do not work, we must be open to change. We must have tests. Are decisions speedy? Are we enhancing possibilities for integration? Is support real and consistent? We cannot allow the debate to become entrenched so that when people need change, any change is considered to be a weakness.

I seek reassurance from the minister that the complexities of delivering services will be appraised sensitively in, for example, supporting adults into education, understanding the needs of pre-school children and providing child care. Demands in a secondary school class in which three or four children of asylum seekers are being taught become immeasurably different when each such child speaks a different language. It is essential that local authority funding from the Scottish Executive reflects those demands and is sufficiently finely tuned.

It is essential to build partnership locally with mutual respect. We should acknowledge not only the key role of Glasgow City Council, but the potential role of all councils that wish to share in the opportunity to build a fairer and more welcoming Scotland. We must have a partnership with local authorities, the voluntary sector and agencies, including the police and health services. The hard practical work must be done. Those who do that work must be respected for it if we are to ensure that our hopes of a safe and richly diverse community and society are to be realised.

15:38

Mr Kenneth Gibson (Glasgow) (SNP): As Robert Brown said, during time for reflection before the debate Mrs Ravinder Kaur Nijjar of the Scottish Inter-Faith Council made a heartfelt plea for us to "tear down ... walls" and barriers between faiths. Although Mrs Nijjar was talking about an

increase in inter-faith tension since 11 September, she could just as well have been talking about asylum seekers. How will barriers be broken down by the introduction of the modern equivalent of the yellow star—the smart card? How will barriers be lowered by the forcing of asylum seekers into detention—sorry, accommodation—centres? How will barriers be removed by the exclusion of asylum seekers from communities?

Mike Watson (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Will you consider asking Kenny Gibson to withdraw his disgraceful remark about the yellow star? We all know what that symbol stands for and the reference is inappropriate in the circumstances. I know Kenny well and I think that he might want to withdraw that shocking comment.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That is not a point of order. It is for the member to decide whether to withdraw a remark.

Mr Gibson: I will certainly not withdraw my remark. As we all know, the yellow star has been used throughout the centuries, not just during the second world war, to identify some ethnic minorities or people of different religions—as in Afghanistan now. Asylum seekers are being targeted because they will have to carry an identity card that is being imposed on no one else. I stand by my comment.

Mr Frank McAveety (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab): Is Kenny Gibson suggesting seriously that the issue that we are debating equates with Nazi genocide? Is he suggesting that it equates to identifying the Jewish community throughout central Europe in order to deny them basic human rights that should have been available to anybody in central Europe? Is he suggesting seriously that that is equivalent to what has been announced in the past few days by the Home Office?

Mr Gibson: The smart card is a way of identifying a group in society.

Mr McAveety rose—

Mr Gibson: As I have already taken an intervention from Mr McAveety, I will continue.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order. The member is not giving way.

Mr Gibson: Mr McAveety's sanctimoniousness is noted—he could have been a contender.

From the start, new Labour policy has been flawed. Johann Lamont wanted to praise Glasgow City Council, but it is clear that she has a short memory, because Glasgow City Council saw asylum seekers as a commodity—it saw them as a resource to seek money from the Westminster Government that it could use to refurbish some of its poorer accommodation. I had a meeting at the

SNP party conference at which Shelter Scotland agreed with me that Glasgow City Council exploited cynically a vulnerable group of people.

Johann Lamont: Will the member take an intervention?

Mr Gibson: No. I have already taken interventions from members opposite.

No effort was made to prepare the host community. No effort was made to prepare the asylum seekers. No effort was made to prepare local services. Where were the translation facilities? Where were the trained social workers who would have been able to deal sensitively with issues? They were not there. It was only when difficulties emerged in recent months that Glasgow City Council started to change its tune. Mistakes were made and now, belatedly, effort has been made to rectify them.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton made an important point about clustering of asylum seekers. I spoke to one of the local housing managers in my constituency who said that 40 flats are available in Tarfside Oval for asylum seekers. I suggested that it would be helpful if those 40 families came from the same culture, faith or ethnic group. That would allow them to communicate with each other in their new environment. When the first 27 families arrived, they were found to speak 21 different languages. Clearly, those folk had been bundled on a bus and sent north without any care or interest having been taken in them. Imagine how we would feel if we were put somewhere in eastern Europe, Africa, the middle east or wherever and were unable to communicate with the people next door in a strange society. That issue must be addressed.

Asylum seekers need respect. They must be treated with dignity. The abolition of the voucher system must take place now. Why must we wait until August 2002 for the system to be abolished? The Executive has invested in language classes, education of locals and the integration of locals and asylum refugee groups. However, London Labour seeks to introduce accommodation centres to house asylum seekers away from society. It is also seeking to refuse support to those who do not attend what it calls its induction course.

The Scottish Executive is providing asylum seekers with legal facilities and a law centre. However, London Labour has no plans to introduce similar measures and is intent on continuing its detention policy. The Scottish Executive is also providing hundreds of thousands of pounds of funding to support communities in Glasgow, in particular communities that host refugees and asylum seekers. London Labour continues to see the solution to the asylum issue as being to hold asylum seekers in the

forementioned accommodation centres.

What should we do? We should compile a list of immigration specialists in Scotland who can provide legal advice to asylum seekers. We should ensure that a standard of Scottish legal advice is provided to asylum seekers that will allow help under legal aid in filling in forms and in representation at immigration and nationality directorate interviews. We should provide an independent interpretation service. We must call for the immigration and nationality directorate to set up a base in Scotland so that asylum seekers from Glasgow need not travel to Liverpool for interviews. We must call for a review of the system of detention.

Last, but not least, we should extend from 14 to 28 days the time that is available to successful asylum seekers for obtaining accommodation. Asylum seekers must be treated with respect, dignity and humanity.

15:44

Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con): I am rather sad to have to follow Kenny Gibson. His comments were totally over the top; they undermined the argument that all of us want to make.

I will be honest—I am not here today to gain popularity. Some of what I will say will cut across members' opinions. However, they are heartfelt feelings and they must be addressed.

Kenny Gibson's derogatory remarks about the way in which the United Kingdom and Scotland accept refugees and asylum seekers were also over the top, as the UK and Scotland already accept such people. His remarks undermine the comments that were made by the French Red Cross and French ministers about the over-the-top reception that Britain appears to give to immigrants. Kenny Gibson should perhaps reflect upon what he said.

Robert Brown talked about the worldwide movement of refugees. According to the Scottish Refugee Council, 13 per cent of refugees who entered the United Kingdom in the past year are from Afghanistan. People were leaving Afghanistan before the terrible events of 11 September and our involvement in that country. There is an old Scots saying: "East, west, hame's best." I am sure that many of those people from Afghanistan would rather live in a place they understand to be home and where they know the circumstances. That is something we should all reflect on after last week's debate.

David Blunkett referred to the 50th anniversary this year of the Geneva convention. The Conservatives identify with the convention and will

always uphold it. We believe that we have a moral obligation to ensure that those who flee persecution should be able to find safe havens. That is our starting point and our baseline. At the same time, however, the Conservatives recognise that there must be some control over those who enter our country. We welcome David Blunkett's agreement with us that we must protect our national boundaries and integrity; that is logical in a civilised society. We regret that, to some extent over the past four years, Mr Blunkett's Government seems to have forgotten that ideal. However, we welcome the fact that there now seems to be a determined attempt to come to grips with that.

We have had assurances from the Labour party today, but I ask the SNP whether it accepts that we must have some form of immigration control. Would the SNP abandon such controls?

Shona Robison: Will the member take an intervention?

Phil Gallie: I remind Shona Robison of a recent public meeting in Glasgow, at which she referred to Scotland as a mongrel nation and suggested that we should have an open-door approach to all who want to come to Scotland and the UK. Perhaps she will comment on that.

Shona Robison: If Mr Gallie had been listening more thoroughly he would have noted that I said that each application should be decided on merit and not on which country a person comes from. I welcome moves towards a green card system that would separate the issues of asylum and immigration, which are too often mixed up during the debate. I hope that Mr Gallie does not go down that path.

Phil Gallie: My recollection of that meeting is that Shona Robison was not quite so explicit. I welcome her comments today and I am delighted that she seems to be confirming that the SNP believes that an immigration policy must be in place and that we cannot simply open our doors.

However, we must be realistic about trying to implement the policy to which Shona Robison has just agreed. Only 30 per cent of applications from individuals attempting to come into the UK are accepted. That means that 70 per cent of applicants who have been screened are—or should be—required to leave our shores; however, only 10 per cent leave.

Shona Robison: Will Mr Gallie give way?

Phil Gallie: I am not getting through most of what I want to say.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We have some time in hand, so you could have another two or three minutes.

Phil Gallie: You are very generous, Presiding Officer. I will give way.

Shona Robison: More thorough consideration of the facts might have told Mr Gallie that there is an 80 per cent success rate in Scotland in approvals of asylum applications. That figure might put the issue in a different context for him.

Phil Gallie: I have been considering the figures for individuals coming into the UK.

I want to come to the issues as they stand in Scotland. I emphasise that I can identify with the words of the Minister for Social Justice. There is a need to provide services when asylum seekers are here. *[Interruption.]* I can see that the minister is getting upset because I am agreeing with her. As a Conservative, I accept common sense. It makes a change for such common sense to come from the minister. It is necessary to consider the social services that are provided, education, the justice system and all the other services that people need in their everyday lives. That is one reason why I applaud the idea of reception centres. There is a need for people to be inducted into the country so that they can have our culture, benefits system and all other aspects of our society explained to them in appropriate surroundings. David Blunkett's proposals, which in the main go back to previous Conservative proposals, offer a way forward that will bring solace to those strangers who come into our land. We must recognise that and we must help them.

I identify with something that Kenny Gibson said. He said that a batch of 28 individuals who came in represented 21 different nationalities—that is not good enough. One of the benefits of reception centres is that we can bring together people of like minds and like languages.

I see that the Presiding Officer has lost his good will at this point. I thank him for the extension to my time and will now sit down.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: It was an extraordinarily generous extension. Phil Gallie was given an additional three and a half minutes.

15:52

Mike Watson (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab): I am sure that I will be treated equally with Phil Gallie.

Kenny Gibson's remarks saddened me. He must reflect on the fact that he has been accused by Phil Gallie, of all people, of being an extremist. I do not mean to make light of Kenny Gibson's remarks: I will happily take them up after the debate.

It is unfortunate that we have descended into making this issue a political football, which I do not think it should be. It was the same with Linda

Fabiani's rambling opening speech. She seemed to decry everything that is being done by the Government at a UK level or in Scotland, without paying any credit. My colleague Johann Lamont has already commented on Linda Fabiani's remark that virtually nothing happened in Glasgow until Jackie Baillie—fine woman and excellent minister though she is—took up her current post. That is a travesty of the truth. I am sure that Linda Fabiani's colleague Shona Robison, who has been working in the cross-party asylum seekers group, will be well aware of that and will no doubt put her colleague right in due course.

Shona Robison: Linda Fabiani was making the point that we must be aware that many problems that have been faced by people in communities have been largely ignored. That is where the problem has lain for the past 18 months.

Mike Watson: Linda Fabiani is ignoring the debate, as she has not been able to stay in the chamber throughout it.

No one has suggested that everything has been exactly as it should have been. I am especially concerned that the brunt of criticism has fallen on Glasgow. It is unfair for criticism to be aimed at Glasgow City Council. It is especially unfair to impugn its motives for accepting so many asylum seekers and refugees. Where are the other local authorities in Scotland that are trying to share the load? We have heard about the City of Edinburgh Council, West Dunbartonshire Council and Fife Council. I have not heard of other local authorities standing up to say, "Yes, there is a problem here. There is a duty on Scotland to spread this load and we will do our bit."

Fiona Hyslop: Mike Watson raises an important point. We all want to see an enhanced dispersal system that is sensitive and offers choice. The concern is that David Blunkett's proposals will not provide that. I was particularly concerned to read in the *Edinburgh Evening News* this week that the City of Edinburgh Council is set to drop the asylum seeker plan because of David Blunkett's proposals.

Mike Watson: I hope that that is not the case. I freely admit that I am not a regular reader of the *Edinburgh Evening News*, but if it stated that, I hope that it is misinformed. I understand that the UK Government remains committed to dispersing asylum seeker families and that that system will not come to an end. I think that that is a very good thing. It is wrong for everyone to be concentrated in London and the south-east. The dispersal programme has many benefits, and I repeat the point that it is time that other Scottish local authorities faced up to their responsibilities.

I do not want to lose the main thread of my speech, which is the crucial issue of integration.

The serious and—in one obvious case—very sad events in the north of Glasgow during the summer highlighted real problems relating to integration with local communities and to communities understanding why asylum seekers were here, what was meant by refugee status and the sort of conditions that had driven those people to this country. However, there is no point in raking over the past. In the months that have followed those events, there have been moves to make it certain that such holes in the net or blanks are filled. I know that much of that work is in progress.

I very much welcome the four separate initiatives that have been introduced to improve integration. The issue is not just about helping asylum seekers themselves; one of the ways in which we help those people is by linking them in with our local communities. That can be done by making it easier to access legal help and by funding English language courses for newcomers to Scotland. When they visited Glasgow in September, the First Minister and the Minister for Social Justice announced very important financial aid amounting to £700,000 over two years not just for the north of the city but for other parts. However, I was a little concerned to hear the minister say in an answer to a question from my colleague Patricia Ferguson that areas in Glasgow that are not social inclusion partnership areas will receive funding from Glasgow City Council. I had not heard that before today. I hope that that money is additional and that Glasgow City Council will not be asked to find it from its existing resources. I am very pleased to see the minister nodding; that deals with that issue.

The final piece in the integration jigsaw is the introduction of the Scottish refugee integration forum, which has been announced today and will be a very important means of tying everything together. As members have mentioned, particularly with reference to Glasgow, about eight out of 10 of those applying for asylum seeker status have their claims upheld and are allowed to stay. As a result, there must be a forward commitment on housing and the various support services that are required after the right to remain has been granted. The work that we carry out now to build all aspects of support networks will be very important in the years ahead. As everyone knows, Scotland is a multicultural society. As Glasgow is the most multicultural part of the country, it is important that the networks that were introduced for previous generations of incomers from various cultures exist for the current waves of refugees and asylum seekers.

I am very encouraged by the moves on integration in the past few months. I am sure that they will result in a much improved service that will broaden the base by involving asylum seekers, refugees and local communities.

15:58

Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): Lord James Douglas-Hamilton's opening remarks reminded me that, after being born in Scotland and then spending some time in London towards the end of the 1939-45 war, I returned to Scotland as a refugee from the bombing of London. I very clearly recall living in an atmosphere of terror and fear. My brother and I were issued with gas masks and had to sleep in cellars in different houses. I imagine that people in Kabul at this time are taking similar precautions with their families.

I pay tribute to Shona Robison and her work in the cross-party group on refugees and asylum seekers. My attendance at the group's meetings reflects not my degree of interest, but my degree of involvement in many other issues that pursue me in my daily work.

One of the big issues that has been discussed this afternoon is the introduction of a smart card. I am in two minds about the measure. Although I understand the human rights objections if the card is described as an identity card, I also see its clear advantages in allowing asylum seekers to access benefits in an easy, quick, efficient and largely confidential way. I am prepared to accept those arguments.

Another matter that has been raised in the debate is the way in which refugees are dispersed. According to the Government's fact sheet, it will be undertaken

"taking into account language clustering and individual needs."

The phrase "individual needs" is the important part of that; language clustering is not enough on its own. Many refugees will follow one another from the same village, and it would be a great shame if refugees were simply language clustered and people from the same village found themselves in different parts of the UK or Scotland. Close attention should be paid to that. Most people in Edinburgh's Italian community, for example, come from the same region, the Abruzzi.

I am concerned by the appeals figures that are cited at the end of the Government's document. It states:

"The then Home Secretary agreed to review the fee level and in January the level was reduced to £50/£125. It was agreed that a team of officials should review the scheme".

It goes on to say:

"The numbers of appeals remain well below the estimated figure. The figure was revised in December from 19,500 to 9,750. The actual number of appeals to date is 3,500."

That may be a matter of concern. If the number of appeals is 3,500 because people are being given excellent legal advice and are therefore not

appealing when they can see that there would be no point in doing so, that would be fine. However, if the figure of £50 to £125 is still a disincentive for people who have clear rights to stay here under the international asylum agreements, that figure should be revised.

16:02

Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP): I want to reflect on why we are here and on UK policy over the past 10 years. It is indicative that this will be the fourth change and the fourth piece of legislation in 10 years. That tells us that UK policy has been unsatisfactory in the past and the extension of where we are now perhaps reflects an ill-thought-out process in the past. The SNP has been consistent. When the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 was before the Westminster Parliament, we voted against it because we thought that elements of it, including the voucher system, would be divisive. That is something to reflect on.

We should also think about where we have come from as a Parliament.

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

Fiona Hyslop: I would like to move on.

It is important that we make a distinction between asylum and immigration. The Home Secretary's statement was entitled "Asylum, Migration and Citizenship", and it is a positive step that we are making such distinctions. Nonetheless, we should think about where we are as a Parliament. It was a tribute to the Social Justice Committee that it responded to a petition from the Actions of Churches Together in Scotland, the Scottish Refugee Council and others.

Johann Lamont: Does Fiona Hyslop agree that when the Social Justice Committee investigated what the petition to which she refers was calling for, we congratulated Glasgow City Council on the work that it was undertaking locally to support people who were moving into the area and that we recognised that the key difficulties related to vouchers and work, which are now being addressed by the Home Secretary?

Fiona Hyslop: I support Johann Lamont's point. One of the recommendations in the committee's report was that Glasgow City Council's powers should be reconsidered. We wanted a pilot exercise whereby the council might be given complete control over the dispersal of asylum seekers in Glasgow, which should be welcomed.

I am not sure where we are with the policy of having accommodation centres—centralised initial points—and then dispersal. I would like to know whether, if it were possible through the new

system to restore to Glasgow City Council the power to determine dispersal within the city, the minister would welcome that and whether the idea could be lodged as an amendment to the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987. We had the opportunity to do that in June, but that course of action was rejected and the SNP was vilified for somehow creating constitutional mayhem. Some very derogatory remarks were made at that time. Nevertheless, we must think carefully about our responsibility and about what we can do.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton made an important point about abolishing the voucher system. The statements from the Government tell us clearly that vouchers are not being abolished but are being superseded, which is an important distinction. Save the Children believes that the voucher system should end immediately rather than being phased out. When the Social Justice Committee went to Glasgow in December, we said that there had to be an urgent review of the voucher system. However, the minister's statement makes it clear that change may not take place until autumn next year, which is two years after the recommendation was made. If the Parliament had any ambition, we could come up with a bill—whether it be a member's bill, a committee bill or an Executive bill—to amend the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968 to restore powers to councils to provide cash. There is a debate around whether cash is what is required. I know that the minister believes that the electronic voucher system would be sufficient, but I am sure that someone who went into a small corner shop to buy a loaf of bread with their electronic voucher card would be seen as being different from other people. The problem would be the same as that which was created by the voucher system.

There is a problem with the delivery mechanism for vouchers. One of the complaints of local councils who, as Mike Watson said, want to embrace this process, is that the vouchers arrive too late and are often sent to the wrong addresses. Such problems would still exist with the electronic voucher system. We should listen to the concerns that we are hearing about whether NASS will provide pre-school support for children.

I am concerned about accommodation centres. When is a detention centre not a detention centre? When it is an accommodation centre. Do we want families with young children to live in such places? When asylum seekers come to this country, quite often they go to where they have connections and contacts. Are they going to be shipped down to an accommodation centre in the south of England instead? There are practical reasons why, although we welcome the movement on the part of the Executive, we are convinced that the system has not been changed to the degree that the Executive was moving towards and that the

Scottish Parliament wanted.

16:07

Paul Martin (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab): Kenny Gibson, a member for whom I have respect despite his affiliation to the SNP, said that Glasgow City Council viewed the asylum seeker programme as a commodity. I have asked this before and I will ask it again: if that were the case, why were the other local authorities not forming an orderly queue at the door of the Scottish Executive's offices?

Mr Gibson: Will the member give way?

Paul Martin: I will let Kenny Gibson answer that point in a moment. I suggest that he should get his facts right, however. It is true to say that Glasgow City Council needs every penny that it can get, but we should be clear about the fact that there is no profit to be had from the asylum seeker programme. If Mr Gibson met Jimmy Andrews, the chief executive of Glasgow City Council, that is what he would be told. I am happy to share with Mr Gibson correspondence that I have on that issue.

Mr Gibson: I genuinely believe the point that I made, as does Shelter Scotland. As Paul Martin knows full well, the reason why there was no orderly queue of other local authorities is that Glasgow has more empty housing units than anywhere else in Scotland. Glasgow participated in the scheme because, although it would not make a direct profit, the cost of having its houses refurbished would in effect be paid for by the Home Office. I genuinely believe that it was a cynical manoeuvre by Glasgow City Council to get those houses refurbished and that there was no further thought for the community or the asylum seekers.

Paul Martin: There is no evidence to back up that claim, but there is comprehensive evidence that that was not the case. I will share with Mr Gibson my correspondence on the issue and perhaps raise the matter again in the chamber. Mr Gibson has made a serious allegation about Glasgow City Council's participation in the scheme. I believe that councillors who were involved, such as Archie Graham, respected the ethos of the programme.

I move on to comment on the Home Office statement. The first point, which is important, is that we asked for a top-to-bottom review of the asylum seekers programme and that is what was delivered. No part of the previous programme was not reviewed from top to bottom. We must address many aspects of that.

We asked for the voucher scheme to be scrapped and, despite Fiona Hyslop's difference of

opinion about when that will happen, it will be scrapped. That is the important point that was raised during our consultation with many groups throughout the UK.

We also called for the skills and qualifications of asylum seekers to be taken into consideration and fully utilised. That has been delivered. The Home Office will make a further statement about that in November. The highly skilled migrant entry scheme will give consideration to the skills that are available to us. In Sighthill, architects, highly skilled medical professionals and teachers are able to provide skills to the local community. They should be given the opportunity to do that. The Home Office has ensured that that will be considered.

Mr Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): I take a great deal of interest in this issue—as do other members of Paul Martin's family.

Does the member think that there is a case for scrapping the voucher system straight away rather than delaying for another 12 months?

Paul Martin: I do not think that there is any evidence to suggest that we could scrap the voucher scheme overnight. We should further explore the possibilities of doing that, but I cannot see any evidence that would allow us to scrap the scheme overnight, despite the fact that many of us want that to happen.

On the dispersal scheme, I agree with some of what Kenny Gibson said about the large number of houses that are available in Glasgow. The dispersal scheme has been scrapped because of many of the problems that we experienced in Sighthill. Dispersing 500 families to Sighthill because there are 500 empty homes in that area is not a comprehensive or strategic way of dispersing families. I welcome the Home Office statement and its commitment to no longer consider the programme as being an effective way of dispersing families.

Shona Robison: Will the member give way?

Paul Martin: I must move on as I do not have much time.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Yes, you are in your last minute.

Paul Martin: I welcome the review. A number of members have raised concerns about smart ID cards, but I believe that they give us an opportunity to support asylum seekers. Many asylum seekers for whom we have no details of nationality, age or medical history arrive in areas such as Sighthill. Properly developed smart ID cards would give us an opportunity to store that kind of information in the card's chip. Members should welcome that development.

I would like to discuss a number of other issues, but I appreciate that we are short of time.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: In view of your constituency, you can have another minute.

Paul Martin: I want to update members on the latest position on integration in Sighthill. I thank the media and SNP members—despite Kenny Gibson's comments—for their support and assistance during a difficult period in Sighthill. I welcome the visit by Prince William and Prince Charles. Since that visit, media coverage has given us an opportunity to improve matters in Sighthill. We continue to work on many projects in the Sighthill community, particularly on supporting asylum seekers in the local community.

I ask the minister to provide for professionals to assist local groups in drawing up applications. I have said before in the chamber that a number of groups are severely affected by not having professional assistance with completing, for instance, applications for lottery grants and other funding packages. Will the minister say how the Executive will provide groups with the professional assistance that they require?

The issue is complex and requires not only funding, but commitment from a number of authorities. I hope that areas such as Sighthill can look forward to that as a result of the recent review by the Home Office and the minister's comments.

16:15

Mrs Lyndsay McIntosh (Central Scotland) (Con): I intend to make a short speech in support of our amendment. My colleague Lord James Douglas-Hamilton has already made quite clear our position that those in genuine fear and with a well-founded claim should find sanctuary here in the United Kingdom. To believe anything else would be to turn our back on our traditions as a hospitable nation and to ignore our long-standing international commitments under the Geneva convention. My Westminster colleague Oliver Letwin said:

"the provision of a safe haven for the innocent victims of persecution"

is

"one of the highest duties of the British state".—[*Official Report, House of Commons*, 29 October 2001; Vol 373, c 630.]

Scotland has a distinguished list of people who have come to this country to make their fortune. Their success has made them household names. I refer to the late Sir Reo Stakis, of hotel, restaurant and casino fame, and to Yaqub Ali, with his cash-and-carry empire. There are many more.

Our current difficulties arise partly because of

the large number of people who apply for asylum and whose cases are decided by the Home Office.

Mr Rumbles: Lyndsay McIntosh said that the people whom she mentioned came to Scotland to make their fortune. Would she not classify them as economic migrants?

Mrs McIntosh: That is precisely the point of my speech.

After their cases have been determined, the applicants may become refugees, but fewer than a third of all applicants are granted refugee status. The process can take a considerable time before a final decision is made and the applicant is given leave to remain. There are accommodation, logistical, financial, health, social and educational considerations that make it in everyone's best interest for decisions to be taken as quickly as possible, so that successful applicants can be resettled swiftly, which will enable them to get on with the rest of their lives. I would be surprised if anybody disagreed with that, with the possible exception, of course, of Mike Rumbles.

Huge complications surround the number of people who wish to settle here and the manner in which they arrive. They do not all come by the same route: some metamorphose through some sort of immigration Scotch mist and settle here without ever coming into contact with any authority figure.

Lord James mentioned the position of economic migrants—those who wish to come to this country to create a better life for themselves. There is no crime in wanting to make the best of every opportunity that comes one's way. I have no hesitation in saying that such a desire is no more than human nature and is as basic as that of any parent who wants a better life for their child. However, that should not confer an automatic entitlement.

One aspect of the dilemma of people seeking asylum who are in truth economic migrants is the chaos and disarray in the system that is suffered by those who have followed the rules, made the correct application and waited their turn. It is simply not fair to those people that the system becomes clogged up by those who claim refugee status without foundation. That demeans the position of people in genuine fear of persecution, who have lived through horrors that we can only imagine.

There is a remarkable comparison between the current position of the Home Secretary and that which we have advocated in the past. Some of the points that we made previously now seem to be finding favour with the Government.

I wish to support the Speaker of the House of Commons, a man of course not unknown to the

person who spoke before me. He took the unusual step of commending the Home Secretary for consigning the detested vouchers to a place in history. Superseded, abolished, scrapped—whatever way it is termed, I will be glad to see the back of them.

We support moves closer to our party's position. The system needs radical overhaul to best meet the needs of genuine applicants and to protect our national boundaries and integrity.

16:19

Ms Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP): I welcome what the Minister for Social Justice said about having meetings with Westminster ministers on the subject of asylum seekers and refugees. I would have preferred the Executive motion to have made some reference to that. Rather than containing just a

"commitment to work in partnership"

with various groups and communities, the motion should also have contained a commitment to work in partnership with Westminster and the national asylum support service. I will return to that point.

I begin by thanking the many groups and ordinary citizens who have worked tirelessly in Sighthill and other areas of Glasgow to integrate the refugees into their community. If they had not highlighted publicly the injustices and unfairness of Westminster's dispersal system, we would not be here discussing once again the plight of asylum seekers. I thank those people, many of whom are voluntary workers, for all that they do.

I will concentrate on two issues: dispersal and the effects of dispersal. I will focus on the situation in Glasgow, because I am a Glasgow MSP and know the Glasgow area better than anywhere else. Glasgow has also taken in most of the refugees who have come to Scotland. The areas to which refugees have been dispersed in Glasgow—Sighthill, Castlemilk, the Gorbals, Maryhill and Scotstoun—have one thing in common: they are all areas of severe deprivation. As has been mentioned, no packages were put in place and there was no communication with communities. Glasgow City Council, to which several members have referred, was given little notice. I congratulate Brian O'Hara of the Asylum Support Project, based in Kelvinhaugh Street in Glasgow, on the hard work that his team does.

Like Paul Martin, I have received correspondence from various agencies and committees of Glasgow City Council. I will quote from a letter that I received from the Asylum Support Project, which will indicate why I think it essential that we contact NASS and Westminster. The letter tells us that the Home Office phoned the

council and pleaded that there was a crisis. It said that every bit of accommodation in the United Kingdom was full up and asked whether Glasgow could take some refugees. The letter states:

"We were asked to take one full coach"—

which later became two full coaches—

"a day starting from 15th December. We advised NASS that, in our opinion, the timing for this was not ideal, given the run up to Christmas, but we ultimately agreed to their request."

The letter continues:

"In the main, NASS had not thought their process through and Asylum Seekers were sent to Glasgow without proper documentation and there were indeed initial problems with vouchers."

The letter indicates that Glasgow City Council has had problems with NASS.

My second point concerns the effects of dispersal. We have all heard about hundreds of people—people who are already frightened—arriving during the night, particularly in the Sighthill area. If we are to believe one tabloid newspaper, which I will not name, they were arriving in an area that was very hostile. It is to the credit of the people living in that area that they thought differently. They welcomed the refugees. The tabloid newspaper to which I refer should be ashamed of itself, as it did a lot of scaremongering and bad work. Members have already mentioned the media. Some of the remarks that have been made in the media are not welcome.

I want to be honest about this issue. If we are honest, we must admit that people have been dumped on communities. There was no consultation. No amenities were made available to the refugees and, more important, to the local people. There are empty halls in the areas that we are discussing. I have pleaded that those be opened up instead of being closed down. Community centres should be opened so that local people can use them.

The problem is that we need better consultation—not just with this Parliament and the local communities, but with Westminster and NASS. We must get them to work with us. If they do not, the situation will not be resolved.

16:24

Trish Godman (West Renfrewshire) (Lab): I want to clarify something that Kenny Gibson said. He accused Glasgow City Council of being in this for the money. I was convener of the policy and resources committee of Glasgow City Council, of which Kenny Gibson was a member. He knows full well that, whenever Glasgow received refugees, every line of every invoice that the committee sent to the Home Office was challenged. Glasgow City

Council had a deficit line in its budget year in, year out because of that. It did not offer to take refugees in order to make money. Kenny Gibson sat on the council's policy and resources committee with me—Shelter did not. That is the truth of the matter.

I welcome the motion, which sets out more humane and civilised proposals for dealing with problems that asylum seekers and refugees experience. As it states, all the policies that we promote from now on must

"assist the integration of refugees".

For me, the first step was to get rid of the voucher scheme. Those who introduced that scheme had a regrettable lack of sensitivity, but I am delighted that steps have now been taken to get rid of the stigma that was attached to it.

We must ask ourselves who the asylum seekers and refugees are, as they include a wide range of people, such as joiners, plumbers, teachers and doctors—professionals of all sorts, as well as those who have few or no skills. The Scottish enterprise companies and the trade union movement—including the Scottish Trades Union Congress—have a role to play in considering how we can retrain people and encourage non-skilled persons to gain skills. We should work with those organisations on those issues. Professional bodies and associations must look at their qualifications systems and agree to accept qualifications from other countries. Surely it is better to integrate refugees into the labour market than into the benefits system.

I want to address what the minister called the second stage and ask her to be proactive about the accommodation centres in Scotland. We are assured that they will be open and that they will not be detention centres. However, I am concerned that the centres were described as being slightly removed from communities, as I am not absolutely sure what that means. If children are bussed from point A to point B and back again, I must question whether that is integration. If English is to be taught, will classes be delivered in the accommodation centres? Again, is that integration? Will women be able to take their children to school, visit the general practitioner if necessary or go to the local shops? I hope that the minister will consider those issues constructively and proactively. Any accommodation centres in Scotland should be used for the purposes of integration, not to set people apart in isolation.

The minister will also be aware that other changes are required. People who work with refugees, including those with whom I worked four years ago when I was chair of the west of Scotland refugee forum, are still concerned about how speedily they must act to find interpreters and

solicitors. That issue must be addressed and constantly monitored, as must the lack of speed that is taken when final decisions are reached on whether a person is able to stay in this country. In the meantime, as we are stuck with the clumsy dispersal system, we must genuinely address issues of integration. I believe that the motion does that.

I ask the minister a question. The Scottish Executive employs many people. Do we have any jobs for refugees? Should not we lead by example?

I am the granddaughter of an Irish immigrant. It will be a measure of our success if, at some time in the future, the granddaughter or grandson of a refugee can stand up and say, "My grandparents came here as refugees at the turn of the century. Here I am—a member of the Scottish Parliament." That is integration.

16:28

Colin Campbell (West of Scotland) (SNP): That was a brilliant finish, Trish.

I consider myself immensely privileged to have reached my age without having gone to war, been a victim of famine or suffered for my political stance, other than at the ballot box. The stability of my home, society and family are integral to my well-being. I cannot imagine what disruption to any of those would do to my psyche, my self-esteem or my sense of security and I cannot imagine how I would feel were I transported to live in an unfamiliar culture. Asylum seekers have experienced some or all of those feelings and must attempt to maintain the normality of life despite the circumstances that forced them to flee.

Both the Executive's motion and the SNP's amendment refer to the availability of appropriate services. I will concentrate on health care. I regard the availability of free, efficient and prompt health care as a right for myself and for every citizen and guest, irrespective of whether the guest is a tourist or an asylum seeker. The British Medical Association made it clear that, in the current situation, many slip through the medical net, although I appreciate that the situation is changing. The BMA said:

"Asylum seekers are among the most vulnerable people in Britain. Displaced from their homes, in flight from persecution, often subject to mental and physical violence, they seek sanctuary in countries with more liberal, compassionate reputations. Yet on arrival in the UK their health, already precarious, often deteriorates. And for good reason. The Government's system for the handling of asylum-seekers is not focused on helping but on deterring them. Present procedures are not compassionate but punitive.

Health care for asylum seekers in Britain is patchy, belated and often inappropriate"—

Phil Gallie *rose*—

Colin Campbell: I give way to Phil Gallie.

Phil Gallie: I come back to the point that I made earlier. Why do those such as the French Red Cross and French ministers accuse us of being far too generous in the way that we accept such individuals?

Colin Campbell: I am sure that Phil Gallie does not expect me to speak for the French Red Cross, which might resent my doing so. The French Red Cross is entitled to its opinion. When we are dealing with people who are in sad economic and political conditions, I would rather err on the side of generosity than on the side of stinginess. As someone said, we should remember that, at other times in history, many Scots went as economic emigrants from Scotland to other places in the world.

Let me continue with my quote:

"Health care for asylum seekers in Britain is patchy, belated and often inappropriate. The entitlements are there and certainly there are some excellent initiatives. But entitlement is not the same as access in practice ... The UK signed the United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees in 1951 ... but it is failing."

I know that Jackie Baillie's intent is good and honourable, but that is the BMA's opinion.

Jackie Baillie: Without commenting on whether my intent is good and honourable, I put it to Colin Campbell that the important point is that the induction centre approach, which allows for an holistic assessment of people's needs, means that there will now be an early identification of people's health needs. I hope that Colin Campbell will join me in welcoming that.

Colin Campbell: I appreciate that the system is being changed. I seek the minister's assurance—and I know that I shall get it—that better and universal high-quality health care will be available to asylum seekers under the new arrangements. To provide such things is, as Mrs Ravinder Kaur Nijjar said, to recognise

"the whole human race as one",

or, in my tradition, to

"Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We now move to the wind-up speeches.

16:32

Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD): In speaking in support of the motion, I am not sure whether I must declare an interest. In 1468, I think, the Gorries were a minor branch of the large MacDonald empire, living happily in North Uist at a place called Vallay, when they very incompetently

got massacred by the MacMhuirichs. I presume that my ancestor could run faster than most of them and so escaped. All of that was confirmed about 30 or 40 years ago, when an archaeological expedition from the University of Edinburgh duly uncovered, in a big sand-dune in North Uist, a nice wee castle with a whole lot of unburied guys lying around who had clearly been massacred. Because the local MacDonald big-wig had an interest in a monastery in Perthshire, we seem to have emigrated and reappeared in that area. I also have an economic migrant great-grandfather, who came up from England to better himself. I personally have examples of why people come to these countries.

It is important that we seek out Scottish solutions for Scottish problems. We do not need slavishly to follow what is happening at Westminster, although Westminster obviously controls some aspects of the whole asylum seekers business. It is reasonable to criticise what successive Governments at Westminster have done or failed to do. It is fair enough to point out some of the national and local failures to deal with asylum seekers properly. We have all made mistakes. It is fair enough to criticise vigorously any of Mr Blunkett's proposals that people do not like, such as cards. However, the hyperbole that we have heard from some speakers does not help. If a member has a good case and grossly overstates it, he or she demolishes that case. I may be teaching grannies to suck eggs, but we really had some prime examples today.

We should seek Scottish solutions to the problems of asylum seekers in Scotland. Various people have said that we must aim for integration. One of the best ways of doing that is to find, as soon as possible, paid jobs for asylum seekers who have qualifications. Voluntary activities should be found for others. Robert Brown made a good suggestion about involving people in citizens advice bureaux; there must be a lot of other organisations that would welcome more volunteers. Some voluntary bodies would benefit from manual help—help to carry things around and so on—so even asylum seekers whose English is not so hot could get involved in a local group and do something worth while. That kind of thing helps people to integrate.

I do not see why an asylum seeker who is a doctor cannot get a temporary job if his qualifications are of a sufficiently high standard. In due course, his appeal may fail and he may be sent away, but I do not see why that should prevent him from being given a temporary job. That idea seems common sense to me and I do not see why there is such resistance to it at UK level. I hope that it may be possible to wangle the rules a bit so that Scotland can deal with things differently, especially, as Robert Brown suggested,

in the voluntary sector, where we must be able to do things in our own way. I hope that we can also do things to do with paid employment in our own way.

We must change people's attitudes towards asylum seekers—and perhaps also change some asylum seekers' attitudes. In view of one of my current interests, it may be a good idea, especially in Glasgow, to explain to asylum seekers who are not Christians that they must decide whether they are Protestant Muslims or Catholic Muslims. They would then be able to integrate into society accordingly.

Jackie Baillie: Does Mr Gorrie accept that there are other teams in Glasgow, including Partick Thistle? People should be able to define themselves as Jags supporters as well.

Donald Gorrie: It would indeed be much more sensible if they supported other teams. My example was frivolous, but I wanted to show that there are ways of helping asylum seekers to identify with us and us with them.

I hope that, in a harmonious spirit, we can all support the Executive motion.

16:38

Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con): A number of interesting speeches have been made this afternoon and I start by saying that I welcome the minister's constructive and helpful speech—I have no doubt that it was sincere. I was touched by her reference to Partick Thistle and her exhortation to people to join us—we are, of course, building a new stand at the moment for that very purpose.

For somewhat different reasons, the Conservatives also welcome the contribution that the Home Secretary made earlier in the week. Somewhat belatedly, he is acknowledging that the Government's asylum policy is a total and abject failure. Who is responsible for the shambles? The shambles in Glasgow is not, as some members have said, the fault of Glasgow City Council, which has made a sincere effort to give assistance. It certainly made some wrong decisions, but in no respect should it carry the overall responsibility. The shambles is also not the fault of the asylum seekers. For once, it is not even the fault of Jackie Baillie and Margaret Curran. It is the fault of the Home Secretary and his predecessor, who failed to recognise the gravity of the situation.

If I were to say that an asylum policy should, in essence, be firm, fair, speedy and sensitive, I think that most people would agree. The policy should be geared towards achieving a quick determination. Those whose applications fail should be required to go home as quickly as possible. Those who stay must be assisted in every way possible to integrate into, to benefit

from and to contribute to our society. I think that everyone would agree with that.

What do we have, however? We have a situation in which the dispersal policy has failed and vouchers are discredited. Indeed, there is a general recognition that the Government's asylum policy has failed all round.

The more I watch the situation changing, the more I see the accommodation and reception centre concept being embraced by the Government. The ending of the voucher scheme and the fact that NASS is becoming itinerant seem to be a total vindication of Conservative policy. I know that that would be a step too far for the Government and I do not ask the Executive to accept what the Conservatives say, but perhaps it could accept what the Social Justice Committee said earlier this year. Those of us who were members of the committee at the time recognised that the voucher system was discriminatory, unwieldy and had an adverse effect on the people whom it was supposed to help—the asylum seekers. We recognised that making people go on a bus down to NASS in Croydon to have their applications determined was quite wrong. It is good that, as the minister said, that is to change. However, why has it taken so long? Are those coming from Croydon likely to get a nosebleed when they pass the Watford gap? I do not know. It is urgent that the change be implemented.

It will take some time to change the ill-thought-out dispersal policy. Why were people allocated to go to various places when no thought was given to the language that they spoke? Would it not have been common sense to think that those who spoke Farsi, for example, should be sent to the same place and that those who spoke Arabic or Urdu should be sent to the same places? That is not rocket science; it is common sense.

As we go further down that road, we must recognise that, much as we might like to, there is no way that we can accommodate all those who seek asylum on our shores. At the moment, the world is a particularly unhappy place. Many people face oppression or the threat of death in their own countries. However, many applicants—something like 70 per cent—are seeking asylum in our country simply because they wish to better themselves. As Lyndsay McIntosh identified, that is a very human instinct. However, when the system is as cluttered as it is at present, it is inevitable that we will be unable to help all those who are so desperately in need of help.

For far too long, the Government has sent out the wrong message—that we are a soft touch on asylum. The Government should have been much more forceful with the French, who set up the Sangatte reception centre on the outskirts of the channel tunnel terminal. It was inevitable that that

would cause problems.

We are improving matters and this afternoon's debate has referred to the constructive steps that have been taken. However, the odium of the problem rests firmly and fairly with the Westminster Government.

16:43

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

I welcome the debate, but I want to ask why it has taken two and a half years to get round to it and to begin talking about a strategy for integration. I would put Labour's question back to the Labour party, and ask why it is so obsessed with the constitution and what constitutes a reserved matter. It has delayed this debate for two and a half years for precisely that reason. Members of all parties have asked important questions about asylum issues, only to receive the stock reply, "That is a reserved matter." I am happy that we have moved beyond that; I am just sorry that it has taken so long.

When Fiona Hyslop made a practical proposal to improve the dispersal system by giving local authorities more powers in that respect, it was dismissed out of hand as a constitutional ploy. That says more about the mindset of the Labour party than it does about the SNP.

Let us be clear. Our complaints about the lack of action over the past few years are not directed at those who have worked extremely hard in communities throughout Scotland to welcome and support asylum seekers—many of those people provide crucial support. What I am talking about is the lack of action from Government, which has refused to take responsibility for asylum seekers and which allowed tensions to grow in Scottish communities. I find it slightly worrying that the Executive has not accepted those facts. I thought that lessons had been learned, but the complacent tone that some people have taken in the debate is a cause for concern, because complacency is something that we cannot afford.

The recent *Evening Times* poll, which was depressing, showed that 93 per cent of the people who were asked do not want asylum seekers living in their communities. Clearly, we have a long way to go. I welcome the anti-racism campaign announced by Jackie Baillie, because it is important to send a clear message that racism will not be tolerated in our society.

I take this opportunity to back the call from Mrs Ravinder Kaur Nijjar for an interfaith centre, which is a good proposal. It could provide a place for people to overcome any prejudices and differences that they have. I hope that the Minister for Social Justice will respond positively to that suggestion.

I will deal with some of the issues that have been raised in the debate. Jackie Baillie made much of David Blunkett's announcement of his intention to increase the value of vouchers to the level of income support. While that is welcome, she made no mention of the fact that her Government has left people to survive on 70 per cent of what is regarded as the minimum amount that it is possible to survive on for 18 months. It would have been good to receive an acknowledgement of the failure of the system.

Labour members talked about vouchers being scrapped, but they are being superseded by a smart-card system. The question remains: why is one system that stigmatises asylum seekers being replaced with one that, if it does not stigmatise them, at least does not normalise the lives of asylum seekers? As Robert Brown said, one cannot buy bread and milk with a smart card. Why has there been such reluctance to return to a more cost-effective cash-based approach? I can only assume that the message is that asylum seekers cannot be trusted with money. Why else would the Government implement a system that costs more than a more efficient cash-based system? That is the only conclusion that I can draw. I hope that the Minister for Social Justice will give an alternative reason.

While she is doing that, perhaps she can tell us what proposals she provided in her consultation with Westminster. I presume that she called for the voucher scheme to be scrapped. Did she advocate as a replacement a cash-based scheme, which has been advocated by every refugee organisation in Scotland? I hope that the minister represented their views when she proposed a system to replace vouchers.

Johann Lamont: Will Shona Robison acknowledge the comments that have been made in the chamber about the positive benefits of smart cards and separate herself from the comments of her colleague, which attempted to associate smart cards with what happened in middle Europe in the 1930s and 1940s?

Shona Robison: I first heard that analogy from an Afghan asylum seeker. I agree that we should all be careful with the use of language. That applies also to Government ministers, who year after year talked about bogus asylum seekers, which did little to help the integration of asylum seekers.

I say to the minister that the smart card that will be given to asylum seekers, which will not normalise their lives, can in no way be compared to the card that MSPs carry and are well rewarded for carrying.

I will address dispersal, because it seems that there is some confusion. I hope that Jackie Baillie

will clear up that confusion this afternoon. The minister stated that dispersal stays. A few minutes later, one of her colleagues said that he is pleased that the dispersal system has gone. The minister must clear up what is happening to dispersal under David Blunkett's proposals. If the *Edinburgh Evening News* report on Edinburgh City Council's response is to be believed, local authorities are also under the impression that the dispersal system has gone. Urgent clarification is required.

I welcome the Scottish Executive's belated response to the issue of asylum, but I have severe reservations about the different tone and content of David Blunkett's proposals, and those reservations are shared by Labour members.

I am happy to support the amendment in Linda Fabiani's name.

16:51

The Deputy Minister for Social Justice (Ms Margaret Curran): Like everyone who has spoken, we welcome the debate. It is recognition of the importance that the Executive and the Parliament accord to the issue. That is reflected throughout Scottish society and by local authorities—I had written that down before the debate—most notably Glasgow City Council. The importance of the issue is also recognised by other key organisations and individuals.

It is important that we assess our approach to asylum seekers, particularly this week. The Scottish Executive is clearly aware of the need to have a reasoned debate so that we can match the ability to make proper provision with the aspiration to ensure equity, tolerance and accessibility. It is critical to establish from the outset the significance of the positive work that has been and is being done. It does not make the headlines, but effective work is being done by local communities, local agencies and the Scottish Executive.

I echo Johann Lamont's sentiments about the need for rigorous appraisal of the impact of policies and the need to think about the work that we are doing. I would be happy to discuss with Paul Martin the means whereby we are supporting local organisations through the KickStart programme and social inclusion partnerships. That should give him the reassurance that he seeks.

We will work hard to develop an approach that fosters good practice and shares experience. That can be achieved only through partnership working. Let us hope that today's debate has shown that we are aware of the circumstances faced by asylum seekers. We are sympathetic to the issues and, wherever we can be, we are committed to working towards making Scotland a welcoming and tolerant society.

It is right to seek to identify the areas and ways in which we can do more. After all, it is in everyone's interests—not just the interests of asylum seekers or refugees, but the interests of the whole of Scotland—that we live in a welcoming, tolerant society.

Earlier this week, the Home Secretary announced a substantial package that sets out the principles for the UK Government's approach to asylum, migration and citizenship. We will keep in close contact with the Home Office as it develops its detailed proposals and operational arrangements. Meanwhile, our focus remains on ensuring that asylum seekers and refugees in Scotland—and those yet to arrive—have access to services and support and are free of racist attacks and harassment.

I turn now to some of this afternoon's contributions. I am disappointed that I must strike a negative note, because I did not intend to do so, but I must, because some statements were misleading and confusing. Unfortunately, I must say to the SNP that if it presents itself as an Opposition party, it is not good enough—

Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Hear, hear.

Ms Curran: Thank you.

It is not good enough for the SNP to cast aside questions about its policies. It is incumbent upon the SNP to explain its policies in the debate.

Linda Fabiani: We were asked about our immigration policy, but the Executive has admitted that it thought that it was extremely important that immigration policy be separated from asylum policy in discussion of the asylum issue. That is what I said.

Ms Curran: Nonetheless, we still wait to hear what the SNP's immigration policy is, because we can deliver a progressive, sensitive approach to asylum only if we also deliver a realistic approach to immigration. It is time for the SNP to understand that it must come clean about its approach to immigration and give us a consistent analysis of its position.

The Executive is not complacent and it was wrong of Shona Robison to suggest that it is. We recognise the need to evaluate policy. We are willing to listen to those beyond our party boundaries, but the SNP insulted the debate and the Parliament when it indulged yet again in absurd reductionism. We hear that every problem that we face can be tackled only by constitutional rearrangement. Shona Robison says that that is our obsession, but if that is so, why did every single SNP speaker—or if not every speaker, at least 70 per cent of them—talk about the Parliament's powers, without for one minute

saying what the SNP would do if it had those powers? The SNP cannot even manage to be a proper party of Opposition, let alone a proper party of Government.

I will address some of the issues that Linda Fabiani raised in detail. Induction centres are intended to help people. Their purpose is not only to assess people, but to support them. Many people have welcomed the centres. Three accommodation centres will be piloted and will tackle 3,000 out of 47,000 people. Dispersal stays. Mr Blunkett has said that the accommodation centres are being trialled and will be assessed. That is a proper approach. Accommodation centres have been established in Denmark and the Netherlands. The SNP is keen to bring European countries to our attention, so I hope that it will pay attention to our approach. I do not believe that Linda Fabiani is happy to condemn people to substandard bed-and-breakfast accommodation. It is incumbent on us to attempt new approaches.

Kenny Gibson outshone Linda Fabiani. He shamed himself and the Parliament with his speech. His remarks were ill judged and intemperate and will return to haunt him, John Swinney and the SNP. Kenny Gibson said that Glasgow City Council used asylum seekers as a commodity—I will check the record, but I think that he used that word. That is an insult not only to the political leadership of Glasgow City Council, but to the council's staff. The SNP said that we were right to link anti-racism campaigns to the work that we are discussing. It should also pay tribute to Glasgow City Council for its work on anti-racism campaigns over many years. Mr Gibson's remarks were inappropriate.

Mr Gibson went further. I will quote David Blunkett's comments about smart cards, because we were on the margins of proper debate on the issue. Robin Harper's comments are worth great consideration. David Blunkett said:

"our proposed card will have a strip to entitle people to the support that they seek and the cash that they get."—
[*Official Report, House of Commons*, 29 October 2001; Vol 373, c 642.]

In a society where cards, with or without photographs, are in everyday use, they will not lead to stigmatisation and could increase access to important services. For Mr Gibson to leap to identify those cards as yellow stars is shocking; it shames his party. I ask him to withdraw what he said—I wonder why he is not present. It is one thing to preach tolerance, but another to practise it.

The Scottish Parliament must rise above that debate. The Scottish Executive has a wider responsibility to engage with groups throughout Scottish society, to continue to work with our

colleagues in Whitehall and in Scotland and to work with the private and voluntary sector for the provision of more accessible, co-ordinated and good-quality services.

It is proper that our treatment of asylum seekers is at the top of the political agenda. We want to ensure that Scotland plays its part in welcoming and supporting those who flee persecution, war and famine. We value them and support them in coming to Scotland. We value and will assist the host communities, which have contributed much. There is much work to do and a determined effort to get on with it.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

16:59

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): We move to consideration of two Parliamentary Bureau motions, S1M-2383 and S1M-2384.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament directs that under Rule 11.8.3 any decision at Stage 2 of the Police and Fire Services (Finance) (Scotland) Bill shall be conducted using the electronic voting system.

That the Parliament agrees that Rules 9.5.3B and 9.7.9 of the Standing Orders be suspended for the purposes of the Police and Fire Services (Finance) (Scotland) Bill.—
[*Euan Robson.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I understand that motion S1M-2384 is to allow stages 2 and 3 of the Police and Fire Services (Finance) (Scotland) Bill to be taken on the same day.

Decision Time

17:00

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): I have five questions to put to the chamber as a result of today's business.

The first question is, that amendment S1M-2377.2, in the name of Linda Fabiani, which seeks to amend motion S1M-2377, in the name of Jackie Baillie, on asylum seekers and refugee integration, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Adam, Brian (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
Campbell, Colin (West of Scotland) (SNP)
Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)
Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
Elder, Dorothy-Grace (Glasgow) (SNP)
Ewing, Dr Winnie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
Gibson, Mr Kenneth (Glasgow) (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)
Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
McGugan, Irene (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
Morgan, Alasdair (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP)
Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
Paterson, Mr Gil (Central Scotland) (SNP)
Robison, Shona (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
Ullrich, Kay (West of Scotland) (SNP)
Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
Wilson, Andrew (Central Scotland) (SNP)

AGAINST

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (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)
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
Fergusson, Alex (South of Scotland) (Con)
Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
Fitzpatrick, Brian (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)
Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
Gray, Iain (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Lab)
Harding, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
Jenkins, Ian (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
Johnstone, Alex (North-East Scotland) (Con)
Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
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)
McAllion, Mr John (Dundee East) (Lab)
McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
McIntosh, Mrs Lyndsay (Central Scotland) (Con)
McLetchie, David (Lothians) (Con)
McMahon, Mr Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)
Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
Raffan, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (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)
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)

ABSTENTIONS

Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 31, Against 79, Abstentions 1.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The second question is, that amendment S1M-2377.1, in the name of Lord James Douglas-Hamilton, which seeks to amend motion S1M-2377, in the name of Jackie Baillie, on asylum seekers and refugee integration, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

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

AGAINST

Adam, Brian (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
Campbell, Colin (West of Scotland) (SNP)
Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)
Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
Elder, Dorothy-Grace (Glasgow) (SNP)
Ewing, Dr Winnie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
Fitzpatrick, Brian (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)
Gibson, Mr Kenneth (Glasgow) (SNP)
Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
Gray, Iain (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Lab)
Hamilton, Mr Duncan (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)

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)
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)
Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
McAllion, Mr John (Dundee East) (Lab)
McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
McGugan, Irene (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
McMahon, Mr Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
Morgan, Alasdair (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP)
Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
Paterson, Mr Gil (Central Scotland) (SNP)
Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
Raffan, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
Robison, Shona (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
Rumbles, Mr Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
Simpson, Dr Richard (Ochil) (Lab)
Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
Smith, Iain (North-East Fife) (LD)
Smith, Mrs Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
Thomson, Elaine (Aberdeen North) (Lab)
Ullrich, Kay (West of Scotland) (SNP)
Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
Wilson, Andrew (Central Scotland) (SNP)

ABSTENTIONS

Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 18, Against 93, Abstentions 1.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The third question is, that motion S1M-2377, in the name of Jackie Baillie, on asylum seekers and refugee integration, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament welcomes the Scottish Executive's commitment to work in partnership with the public, private and voluntary sectors to welcome and integrate asylum seekers and refugees to Scotland and further welcomes the Executive's commitment to build improved dialogue with asylum seekers and refugees and host communities and, through partnership working, enable the provision of more accessible, co-ordinated and good quality services, protection from the threat of racist attacks and harassment, and the sharing of good practice to assist the integration of refugees.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The fourth question is, that motion S1M-2383, in the name of Mr Tom McCabe, on electronic voting, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament directs that under Rule 11.8.3 any decision at Stage 2 of the Police and Fire Services (Finance) (Scotland) Bill shall be conducted using the electronic voting system.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The fifth question is, that motion S1M-2384, in the name of Mr Tom McCabe, on the suspension of standing orders, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees that Rules 9.5.3B and 9.7.9 of the Standing Orders be suspended for the purposes of the Police and Fire Services (Finance) (Scotland) Bill.

World Alzheimer's Day

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Patricia Ferguson): The final item of business today is a members' business debate on motion S1M-2187, in the name of Cathie Craigie, on world Alzheimer's day.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament expresses its support for World Alzheimer's Day, held on 21 September every year; recognises its aim of raising global awareness of dementia and its impact on families; notes that around 58,000 people suffer from dementia in Scotland, and further recognises the importance of the work of organisations such as Alzheimer Scotland - Action on Dementia in supporting sufferers and their families.

17:05

Cathie Craigie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab): I thank MSPs for attending this evening's debate and all my colleagues who have supported the motion. I also thank Alzheimer Scotland—Action on Dementia, which has been helpful to me over the past week in preparing for today's debate, and the Scottish Parliament information centre, for the useful briefing paper it issued to members.

My motion, which was lodged at the beginning of September, highlights world Alzheimer's day on 21 September. Obviously, today is not 21 September, but the motion's sentiments apply whatever the date and I welcome this evening's opportunity to debate the issue.

There are 58,000 people with dementia in Scotland—more than the adult populations of the towns of Cumbernauld and Kilsyth put together. Fifty-five per cent of dementia sufferers have Alzheimer's disease; 97 per cent of people with dementia are more than 65 years old; and 25 per cent of people over 85 will have dementia. A little-known fact is that dementia is the fourth biggest killer after heart disease, stroke and cancer. Alzheimer's is a progressive illness that affects memory, understanding and behaviour. As many people know, the day-to-day activities that we take for granted, such as going to the shops and speaking to friends, gradually become more difficult. Difficulties increase and eventually basic tasks such as dressing, cooking and eating become impossible without the help of a carer.

There is growing awareness of the needs of dementia sufferers and their families. Most people have a relative who suffers from dementia or know someone who suffers from it and the research supplied by SPICe indicates that one in five of us will probably develop the illness. It is time that we sat up and took notice of the condition.

I welcome the action that the Scottish Parliament has already taken to help people with

Alzheimer's and their families. The Adults with Incapacity (Scotland) Act 2000—one of the first pieces of legislation passed by the Parliament—gives welcome rights and legal protection to sufferers and their families and carers. The Regulation of Care (Scotland) Act 2001 will improve the quality of social services and give carers more input into the inspection of care services. A major step forward since Malcolm Chisholm's debate on dementia awareness week last September—which was also held after the fact—is the Executive's commitment to introduce free personal and nursing care. That corrects the great injustice of dementia sufferers paying for the care that they need due to their illness.

However, there is still more to be done. What we need to do does not necessarily cost magnificent sums of money. The first point of contact is usually the general practitioner through the local health centre. That is not always a good point of contact. Sometimes, people are sent away thinking that they have dementia, that it is just a normal part of growing old and that there is little that the doctor can do. That is wrong. People should not go away from their first point of contact with such a negative outlook. They should be pointed in the right direction to find help, assistance and advice, not only for themselves but for family members who will be involved in their care.

Care packages must be provided where professionals and all those involved in caring for the person can communicate on equal terms for the good of the individual and their family. The services are usually available, but resources are wasted when professionals and managers do not speak to each other or share information. Sometimes, they do not pick up on the valuable information that is available through home carers and home helps. I hope that the minister and his department will continue to take action to change that, because it can make a difference.

Early diagnosis is essential. Without it, Alzheimer's sufferers and their carers and families cannot fully access the help and treatment they need. Early diagnosis provides an opportunity to plan for the future and participate in important decisions before further deterioration occurs. It is also important because the drugs that are available work best on patients with mild to moderate Alzheimer's. Often, the earlier the treatment, the more effective it can be.

Richard Lochhead (North-East Scotland) (SNP): Will Cathie Craigie join me in questioning the attitude of Grampian Health Board? It has instructed GPs in Grampian not to prescribe the new drugs that are available, which would delay the onset of Alzheimer's.

Cathie Craigie: Thanks for that intervention. I hope to address that issue later in my speech.

It is estimated that approximately 23,000 patients in Scotland have mild to moderate Alzheimer's. Of those, 11,500 may be eligible for treatment and approximately 40 per cent are expected to respond positively to treatment.

It is essential that people with Alzheimer's disease are able to access the available treatments. Three drugs are licensed in the UK. They do not work wonders for all, but they can make a huge difference in the lives of many people with Alzheimer's, ranging from offsetting the symptoms of the disease to enabling people to do everyday things for longer.

The potential for help makes early diagnosis even more essential. I understand that a delay of even a few months in treatment means that skills, which may never be regained, can be lost. It is important to note that the drugs that are licensed in the UK do not work for all people with dementia, but they offer hope of a better quality of life for many.

As Richard Lochhead said, Alzheimer Scotland—Action on Dementia released a report today. It shows that people in some areas of Scotland are 12 times more likely to be able to access treatment than those in other areas. It follows the Health Technology Board for Scotland's comments on the National Institute for Clinical Excellence's guidance. The HTBS's comments aimed to

“maximise the access of eligible patients in Scotland to these drugs that have been shown to be clinically and cost effective for the treatment of Alzheimer's disease.”

That statement was widely welcomed by a lot of people who suffer from Alzheimer's, their families and those involved in their treatment and care. The HTBS's comment recognises the need for GPs in Scotland to be able, in discussion with a specialist, to administer the treatment.

Alzheimer Scotland's report shows that, in the main, there are no long waiting lists for assessment or treatment but, despite the HTBS's welcome guidance, according to the information given by health boards throughout the country, a postcode lottery still exists. In Ayrshire and Arran Health Board, 47 per cent of people likely to be suitable for treatment are being treated. The figure falls to as little as 3.8 per cent in Orkney. I am sure that colleagues agree that that is not acceptable. A person's address should make no difference to their ability to access medication or medical treatment. I hope that the minister will address that point.

The era of no available treatment is ending. We must ensure that people who could benefit from treatment—those with mild to moderate Alzheimer's—are able to access it.

My motion pays tribute to the work of Alzheimer

Scotland, other charities and voluntary organisations in highlighting and supporting the needs of people with Alzheimer's, their families and carers. I reiterate that sentiment. Carers are a very important part of this. I am sorry that I have not had time to go into that point in detail; some colleagues might like to raise that point.

Dementia has been recognised as a separate medical condition for only about 40 years. Opportunities to highlight it, such as this debate, are important and I hope that we will be able to make progress as a result. Some changes have been made in the past year. I hope that, next year, we will be able to stand up in the chamber and say that there have been some changes for the good.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: A large number of members want to speak. I ask members to limit their speeches to three minutes in order to accommodate all those who want to speak.

17:14

Mrs Margaret Ewing (Moray) (SNP): I congratulate Cathie Craigie—I am sure on behalf of the chamber—on bringing this issue forward as a members' business debate. Although the debate is headed "World Alzheimer's Day", the date does not really matter. For people with Alzheimer's and their families, relatives and friends, every day is world Alzheimer's day, because their world has been destroyed.

Many soft and sincere words have been spoken on this issue. However, as Cathie Craigie rightly pointed out, people too often say that the disease is part and parcel of the aging process. I urge that, at local level, there is close liaison between general practitioners and all the available support systems in our communities to ensure that people do not simply say about a sufferer, "Oh, she's just forgotten what she went out to buy in the high street." I agree with Cathie Craigie about carers. They are very important people without whom many of those who suffer from the disease would be in more difficult circumstances.

I want to highlight the issue of postcode prescribing, which Richard Lochhead raised. I read the Alzheimer Scotland—Action on Dementia report "Postcode prescribing persists" with deep concern. Although many constituents have raised this issue with me, I did not realise that the statistics would be quite so disastrous. Orkney Health Board has the worst provision, followed by Grampian Health Board, Tayside Health Board, Highland Health Board and Dumfries and Galloway Health Board. The information that, in my area, only 4 per cent of people with Alzheimer's are likely to have the drugs that are available is quite appalling.

The report says:

"Grampian has only very recently allocated any money at all to these treatments, and even now has only budgeted £25,000 for the remainder of this year, which is seriously inadequate."

Furthermore, the health board is not prepared to guarantee that the amount will not be revised downwards as part of a prioritisation exercise.

The two most restricted health boards are Grampian and Greater Glasgow. In Grampian, for example, only donepezil is available on prescription. This problem has to be seriously addressed. How is one health board able to allocate £123,000 for the treatment of Alzheimer's while another can allocate only £25,000?

I hope that the minister will respond to those questions. We are not asking for a levelling-down of resources. For the sake of those who suffer from Alzheimer's, we are looking for a levelling-up.

17:18

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):

I am grateful to Cathie Craigie for the opportunity to discuss this subject. In the first two and a half years of the Parliament, much of the Health and Community Care Committee's deliberations have centred on the needs of the elderly. It has been a particular privilege to be part of that exciting process.

I note that, according to an Alzheimer Scotland—Action on Dementia press release issued on 20 September, Susan Deacon said that the health service is giving more help and support to this area and that a range of measures, from extra money to extra care and short breaks, is already in place. We constantly hear about the levels of funding that have been allocated to social work and the national health service and the expansion of services, but access to them diminishes almost daily.

The Scottish community care statistics for 2000 show that the number of elderly people seen by a health visitor in the 12 months from 1999 to 2000 fell by 34,400. In the same year, the number of elderly clients seen by a nurse fell by 13,300. In the three years from 1997 to 2000, the net expenditure on all community care fell by £45 million and from 1998 to 2000, the decrease in home care clients was more than 9,000.

I would like to think that the extra money mentioned in the press release—I do not doubt the commitment—is being spent wisely. We can measure that only by the number of people who benefit.

Almost 35,000 people who have Alzheimer's live at home—the statistics are quite fearsome—as they need more community-based services. In the Highlands—the region that has benefited most from Arbutnott funding—the respite care that is

offered to people with dementia at Migdale hospital in Bonar Bridge is being reduced from six to four weeks a year. That is the example that I know of. The situation may be the same in all community hospitals. I do not know what is happening in the rest of Scotland. The reason that Alzheimer Scotland was given for that reduction is bedblocking. After two and a half years of the Scottish Parliament, 169 beds in the Inverness area are still blocked. Unless we sort that out, the elderly will suffer and we will not be able to offer them the resources they need.

The Woodlands Centre in Inverness is a day centre for people with Alzheimer's. I have visited it several times. It is much valued by sufferers, their carers and their families. The real cost per hour for that non-profit-making centre, which allows almost one-to-one care, is £8.51, yet the social work department will pay no more than £7.41. Moreover, we are told that, like other social work payments, it is under review. That review is still continuing after 12 months.

Two weeks ago, two sisters whose mother had Alzheimer's phoned me. She was taken into a Church of Scotland home. They were told that the social work department had no money and that their mother would be delivered to their doorstep in a taxi on Friday. They said, "We will be out. We are not looking after her any more." They did not feel good about that, but it was the only way in which they could force the social work department to address funding.

I accept the points that have been made about postcode prescribing, and I hope that something will be done through the HTBS. I would further welcome the vaccine that is being developed to help prevent the onset of Alzheimer's. Although it is in only the early stages of assessment, it is an exciting prospect.

17:22

Mrs Margaret Smith (Edinburgh West) (LD): I thank Cathie Craigie for giving us the opportunity to address this issue again. As she said, Alzheimer's is the fourth biggest killer in Scotland and affects 60,000 Scots. It actually affects far more than that, because it affects the families of sufferers and those who care for them.

Alzheimer's is a progressive and incurable illness of the brain. We have heard in passing that drugs are available that are effective for some sufferers, especially if the illness is diagnosed early. We must therefore do a better job of circulating information not only to the general public, but to our general practitioners and other health and social care professionals, so that Alzheimer's can be diagnosed as early as possible and the drugs that might be available can be most effective. If people are referred early to day care

facilities such as those that Mary Scanlon and I visited in Inverness during our community care inquiry last year, those facilities can play a major role at least in delaying the onset of Alzheimer's.

The points that members have made about postcode prescribing, picking up on today's report from Alzheimer Scotland that shows that people in some parts of the country are 12 times more likely to be given access to drugs that might help with the condition, are well made and important. This morning, the Health and Community Care Committee questioned the minister—he can respond again this evening—on the wider issue of postcode prescribing.

Scotland has a population the size of Birmingham. It is common sense that we would not expect people in one part of Birmingham to have access to drugs to combat Alzheimer's if people in a different part of Birmingham did not. We cannot accept the fact that in the national health service throughout Scotland, people are subjected to a lottery of care in terms of Alzheimer's drugs, and may be 12 times more likely to get help in one part of the country than they would be in another.

We should not neglect to say that the Scottish Parliament has taken on board many of the points that have been made by sufferers of dementia and their carers. We have done good work in a relatively short period of time. As Cathie Craigie said, in our first year we passed the Adults with Incapacity (Scotland) Act 2000, which had been called for by the families of the sufferers of dementia for three or four decades. The Regulation of Care (Scotland) Act 2001 will have an impact on the provision of services.

The Community Care and Health (Scotland) Bill that is going through stage 1 in the Health and Community Care Committee will also have a major impact. The last time we debated Alzheimer's and related issues, many members talked about the need to introduce free personal and nursing care. We now know that that is on its way, but that is only one of the small parts of the legislation that will have an effect. It will make joint working and the pooling of budgets more possible, for example.

Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): I raise this point at this moment as it is an area on which I hope the bill will have an effect. I hope that Margaret Smith agrees that if a confused 90-year-old man arrives at the accident and emergency department, it is unacceptable to keep him on a trolley for five hours without any attention. That is no way to treat somebody who suffers from Alzheimer's.

Mrs Smith: I have no hesitation in agreeing with Robin Harper on that point.

The bill stresses the need for greater services

for carers, and particularly stresses the need for independent assessments to be given to carers to enable them to access services and information on what help might be available.

We have made great strides, but in terms of the provision of day care services, early diagnosis and the national provision of drugs that might assist people with dementia and Alzheimer's, there is still much to be done.

17:27

Ms Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP): I congratulate Cathie Craigie on securing this debate.

I am wearing two hats: I am the convener of the cross-party group on older people, age and aging and I have an elderly mother who suffers from Alzheimer's. The minister, who is a previous convener of the group, will be aware that we have discussed Alzheimer's and dementia at length. We decided that inadequate information is available to carers, who are often therefore unable to recognise the symptoms of early dementia or even later Alzheimer's. I hope that the minister will respond to that point.

Education is important. Robin Harper mentioned the elderly man who was left on a trolley for five hours. Perhaps some of the nurses and porters who were there did not realise that that elderly gentleman was suffering from dementia.

It is important to remember that carers have a difficult job. The arrangements for respite care are inadequate. It is distressing for the carer to be able to spend only a couple of hours away from the sufferer. It is also distressing for the sufferer to be confined within four walls and unable to get out. Home support would be helpful, as would extra day care and respite care. I hope that the minister will respond positively to that point and to the others that I have raised.

17:29

Janis Hughes (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab): I congratulate Cathie Craigie on securing this important debate and add my support to the views that she expressed.

As Cathie Craigie said, one in five people over 80 years old will develop dementia—that is one in every 100 people in the country. It is crucial that full support is given to sufferers and that everyone is well aware of the issues surrounding dementia.

The issues surrounding postcode prescribing have been highlighted by a number of members. According to Alzheimer Scotland's report, Greater Glasgow Health Board, which covers my constituency, lags well behind what is needed in terms of provision of treatment for sufferers of dementia.

The report also highlights concerns about the restrictive nature of Greater Glasgow Health Board's drug provision. Although the treatment of dementia is an important area—and I hope that the minister will comment on it—the debate needs to be about more than that.

A recent study by the Centre for the Economics of Mental Health calculated that the United Kingdom has to spend £14 billion treating and caring for dementia patients. It estimated that the average Alzheimer's condition requires 45 hours of home care a week. Mary Scanlon mentioned some of those figures. A home help often costs in excess of £9 per hour—that also causes concern.

As we all know, a great deal of the care for dementia sufferers is done by unpaid carers who are family or friends of the sufferer. One of Alzheimer Scotland's greatest strengths is the support and training it provides for such carers, who are often in a distressing situation. I hope that the Scottish Executive will continue to acknowledge and value the work of carers and provide support.

I have only recently become aware of the 24-hour dementia helpline that Alzheimer Scotland provides. I am sure that that is a lifeline for many people in times of crisis or when they do not understand what is happening to them as sufferers, to a loved one or to someone for whom they care.

Raising awareness of the different manifestations of dementia is also vital. We must consider research. We need to look to provide greater funding for research into the cause of dementia. Since the identification of the tau gene by American researchers in 1998, there has been much talk of developing a vaccine, but the cause and development of the disease are not yet fully understood.

Although the money that is spent on treating dementia in Britain outweighs the money that is spent on treating heart disease and stroke, the amount that is spent on researching dementia pales in comparison—it is less than 10 per cent of the money that is spent on researching heart disease. Given that there appears to be light at the end of the tunnel with the advances that have been made in research, it seems that improving research into the causes of dementia should be given priority.

The fact that we are having this debate today is testament to the excellent work that is being done daily by Alzheimer Scotland and by carers all over the country who look after those who suffer from dementia. I am delighted to add my support to the motion.

17:32

Nicola Sturgeon (Glasgow) (SNP): I, too, congratulate Cathie Craigie. I also congratulate organisations such as Alzheimer Scotland and the many thousands of carers throughout Scotland, without whom many services for sufferers of Alzheimer's disease would not exist. Many important points have been made in the debate and I am acutely aware that I am fortunate in that many speakers—not least Sandra White—have a more personal and direct experience of Alzheimer's disease than I.

I want to take a bit of time to reiterate two points, because they are extremely important and I trust that the minister will take time in his speech to address them. I will talk later about drugs and the problem of postcode treatment, but before I do, it is important to point out that for many sufferers of Alzheimer's disease, treatment is primarily about management of their condition and the care that they receive. That is why it is vital that, notwithstanding the debate about the availability of drugs, we ensure that the right support services are in place for sufferers where they need them. We must also ensure that adequate respite care services are available for the benefit of the many thousands of people who care voluntarily for friends or relatives who suffer from the disease.

Mary Scanlon mentioned Migdale hospital in Bonar Bridge, which I have visited in recent months. That hospital is a vital community resource, but for much of the past few years it has had a question mark about its existence hanging over it. As Mary Scanlon said, it must limit the amount of respite care that it offers to sufferers of Alzheimer's disease in that area. I do not think that that is unique to Migdale hospital; I am pretty sure that it is replicated in other parts of Scotland. Although we have come a long way on many aspects of the care and treatment of people who suffer from Alzheimer's disease, we have a considerable distance left to travel to ensure that the right support services are in place for those who suffer from the illness and for the people who care for them.

It has already been said that drugs are available to slow down Alzheimer's disease in those who show mild or moderate symptoms. The point has been made—correctly—that that underlines the need for early diagnosis of the disease. The Health Technology Board for Scotland recently recommended prescription of those drugs, where that is clinically appropriate. However, the reality is—as has been reflected in many comments that have been made in the debate—that the drugs are not universally available and that the postcode lottery remains because, notwithstanding the advice that the Health Technology Board issues, local drugs and therapeutic committees take their

own decisions, which are often limited by financial constraints.

Richard Lochhead mentioned Grampian Health Board, which has instructed GPs not to prescribe the drugs, and other members mentioned other health board areas in that context. The minister—not just tonight, but in future—must address that issue, because it goes beyond the provision of drugs for Alzheimer's disease and relates to drugs for the treatment of many conditions.

When Susan Deacon established the Health Technology Board for Scotland, she said that it would eradicate postcode treatment; in reality, it has not done so. The board or any organisation that succeeds it will not eradicate postcode-based treatment until it gains the power to do so.

I will close with what I believe to be the germane question that the minister must answer this evening. How do we ensure that, in a country of 5 million people, access to drugs will in all cases depend on clinical assessments, not on where people live?

17:36

Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD): I support this excellent debate. I will approach it from the care-in-the-community angle; I am much less equipped than other members to discuss the medical angle. The care of Alzheimer's sufferers is typical of and central to our whole care-in-the-community effort, and it reveals many of the past failures in care in the community. Malcolm Chisholm and other people, including people in some councils, are making efforts to address the problem. However, the system is still defective, particularly with regard to the amount of help that is given to people who suffer from Alzheimer's so that they can remain at home in a safe condition, and with regard to the adequacy of the support that is given to their families so that they can look after sufferers.

We have recently debated the situation of carers and, although we are beginning to do something about their situation, far too little attention is paid to them and too little money is put at their disposal. My former Westminster constituency—now Margaret Smith's Scottish parliamentary constituency—Edinburgh West, has a very good voluntary organisation that helps in giving relief to carers who look after people who suffer from Alzheimer's. That organisation is continually struggling to survive however, and we could perhaps give more money and effort to the voluntary sector to help carers and increase the relief that they get.

Our medical system is naturally more interested in the more dramatic, exciting and politically attractive—if I can call them that—forms of mental

problem, and in high-pressure surgery and that sort of thing, which we might watch on television on the odd evening that we spend at home. We are not so good at looking after conditions such as Alzheimer's, which are a hard daily grind for the people who are involved. Such conditions are not romantic, but cause terrible trouble to sufferers and their families.

I urge the minister to keep up his good work. The more help, encouragement and cash that he can give to councils to run support services for Alzheimer's sufferers, their families and carers, the better.

17:39

Mr Adam Ingram (South of Scotland) (SNP): I add my congratulations to Cathie Craigie on securing this evening's debate. Last week, I had the privilege of attending and speaking to a conference that was organised by the specialist section on the psychiatry of old age of the Royal College of Psychiatrists. I came away from the event with a number of serious concerns.

It is the professionals' view that not nearly enough is being done either in policy development or in application of resources, despite all the work that the Executive and others have done on various strategies. There might now be a clear strategic identity for the elderly mentally ill, but little progress has been made in changing attitudes—both within and outwith the national health service—to dementia and other mental disorders among the elderly. That is despite the fact that a demographic time bomb is ticking away quietly, with the year-on-year increase in the proportion of over-65s and over-75s in the population.

The health service in the 21st century must persuade older people and the professionals who deal with them that mental disability is not an inevitable consequence of aging. Older people seldom query changes in their mental health. They must learn the importance of recognising symptoms of mental health problems such as memory loss, a decline in their abilities in daily living or loss of pleasure in daily activities. Although dementia is irreversible, a great deal can be done for people who suffer from dementia and for their carers. I echo the points that Donald Gorrie made about care in the community and the distance that we must still travel in that direction.

At the moment, unless people who suffer from dementia are diagnosed, they are unlikely to receive support and services until they reach the later stages of the illness, when there is a crisis. However, primary care screening is too much of a hit-and-miss affair and is very dependent on the approach that is taken by individual GPs. The

treatment of Alzheimer's is a case in point. Four years after the launch of the first drug treatment for the disease, we are experiencing a postcode lottery. As I understand the situation, the disparity in uptake is not due solely to budget limitations in health boards. Differences in local practice play a major part in causing problems. In many areas, GPs are not referring patients to hospital specialists or to memory clinics, where they exist. It is significant that the area of highest uptake is Ayrshire and Arran, where memory clinics are very much in existence.

I have no doubt that one of the main barriers to progress is the prevalence of agism in the national health service and in wider society. The attitude still prevails when priorities are being set that our elderly are worth less than other age groups. The Parliament must lead the fight against such attitudes and I hope that the minister will champion that cause.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Two more members have indicated that they wish to speak. I would appreciate it if both members would keep their remarks as brief as possible.

17:43

Dr Richard Simpson (Ochil) (Lab): I begin by declaring that I am the joint holder of a research grant from the UK Alzheimer's Society and that I am the director of a care home that looks after some people who suffer from dementia.

I want to make one or two brief points. The programme planning group on mental illness in the late 1970s and early 1980s resulted in the Timbury report, which proposed domestic-style accommodation for people who suffer from dementia. However, only one unit was ever built. We had 15 wasted years of failing to develop a proper dementia policy. This Parliament has reversed that process quite rapidly through the Adults with Incapacity (Scotland) Act 2000, the Regulation of Care (Scotland) Act 2001 and the Community Care and Health (Scotland) Bill that is now before the Health and Community Care Committee. Other members have referred to those measures, which will provide important support to individuals who suffer from Alzheimer's.

The point about early diagnosis has been well made. We need integrated clinical networks between secondary and primary care. We also need to enhance the capacity of local health care co-operatives to ensure that the conditions that we are discussing are picked up and managed. As other members said, management of Alzheimer's is as important as its medical treatment. Inappropriate use of drugs to manage the condition is one of the most reprehensible aspects of the current situation. We must develop

adequate skills to manage the behavioural or psychological aspects of Alzheimer's through the LHCCs and community psychiatric nurses.

As other members said, we need more research. We must use the health check for the over-75s much more rigorously in order to make early diagnoses. As part of the performance assessment process, we need to ensure that not just seven, but all health board areas have memory clinics.

Finally, we must eradicate postcode prescribing, which is a disgrace. Nearly 100 patients are waiting for treatment in my constituency, which covers the Forth valley area. However, waiting for treatment is not an option, because the condition deteriorates and drugs do not reverse Alzheimer's, as is the case with other conditions; they merely arrest deterioration. People who must wait six months for treatment are six months down the line toward quite a cruel death, during which their families will have a dreadful time.

I found it absolutely intolerable that a constituent who consulted me the other day—a war pensioner whose main carer has developed Alzheimer's—must wait for the appropriate drug and must pay £100 toward treatment.

The condition must be carefully monitored. I say to Richard Lochhead that specialists, not GPs, should do that. The follow-up for those for whom the drug does not work is that they must be taken off the drug, otherwise the treatment is cost-ineffective. That work is done best by properly trained people and I regret to say that not all GPs are adequately trained in dealing with the condition.

17:46

Dr Winnie Ewing (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): Perhaps it is relevant that I should speak in the debate because I am the oldest member of the Parliament. I try to keep the deterioration of my grey cells at bay by the mental stimulation that I get from our debates, which I attend regularly. If that is not good enough, I fall back on crosswords. John Young, who is three months younger than me, and I will both qualify for a free flu injection. I was glad to learn that, in a year or two, we will qualify for something even better: a screening.

I remember having a 99-year-old granny who had absolutely nothing wrong with her—she had her wits and her speech. When I was a child, it never dawned on me that that was not normal, as all my aunts and uncles were well over 80. When he was 82, my father went to the fish market in Glasgow at 7 o'clock every morning. He died because of his addiction to smoking.

Several members have mentioned research.

Janis Hughes made a significant point about research being a priority, with which I agree. At the back of my mind is the feeling that Alzheimer's is an unnecessary condition. That is simplistic of me, but that is what I feel. If only we could put our finger on what to do to stop the condition. When we consider research, we should also examine whether mental stimulation is a preventative, as I am certain that it is. I have visited literally hundreds of residential homes across the Highlands—I have visited some of them many times and I do not think that one exists that I have not visited—some of which have people with Alzheimer's. I have been struck by those homes that provide their residents with great mental stimulation. The nurses in those homes believe that such activities will stave off the condition. Are they right? Do we know the answer to that vital question?

We all have pet medical theories, which must annoy doctors enormously, and I have tried out my theory on visits to psychiatric hospitals in my area. I ask why the bright grannies whom I knew did not get Alzheimer's? They had nothing wrong with them. I am not talking only about my granny but about all those grannies who lived in fairly poor conditions in tenements in Glasgow and who were as bright as buttons. Their diet was different from a modern diet. I have tried out that theory on psychiatrists who dismiss it as nonsense. Yet my 99-year-old granny never had food out of a tin or a packet. She probably always ate all the things that we are told, quite rightly, to eat, as did all my long-living aunts and other relatives.

Research should consider the prevention of Alzheimer's. I am perfectly certain that care in the community, which is a good policy, has prevented many people from sinking into that condition. We do not know the answers to those questions, but I hope that research will bring them to light. I shall not say anything about the drug aspect, because the arguments have been well rehearsed. Let me say only that, for the people close to the person who gets this illness, it is the saddest thing in human life.

17:51

The Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care (Malcolm Chisholm): I congratulate Cathie Craigie on securing the debate. I have no hesitation in agreeing with the motion and with many of the important points that have been made in the debate.

As the motion indicates, there can be no doubt about the need to raise awareness of dementia or about the importance of Alzheimer Scotland's work in supporting sufferers and their families. Since its establishment in 1994, Alzheimer Scotland has become the leading national

organisation providing specialist services for people with dementia. Its local day care and befriending services, respite breaks, carer support and education groups, campaigning activity and information and national 24-hour helpline services—to which Janis Hughes referred—all make a significant contribution towards the improved understanding of, and provision of service to, people with dementia and their carers. I have no hesitation in recording our admiration and respect for Alzheimer Scotland's work.

I am also pleased to pay tribute to the University of Stirling's dementia services development centre, which is at the forefront of world thinking on what can be done to help sufferers of dementia. I was pleased that the Executive was able to provide a grant of £0.5 million to assist the centre with the construction of its new Iris Murdoch building and I was delighted to lay its foundation stone last month.

The needs of dementia sufferers are broad and diverse and demand a broad and diverse response. Many speakers referred to elements of the Executive response, such as the framework for mental health services, the carers strategy, the Adults with Incapacity (Scotland) Act 2000, the Regulation of Care (Scotland) Act 2001, the recommendations of the care development group's report and our whole joint-working agenda. I will deal with some of those issues and with postcode prescribing, which has featured prominently in the debate.

The framework for mental health services sets out a template for dementia services. Last year, we stepped up the implementation of that framework through the creation of the mental health and well-being support group. During its visits, it has been paying attention to those who use services and their carers. I recall its report on its visit to Ayrshire and Arran Health Board, which referred to the good practice and strong local basis of innovative dementia projects. I also remember the example of home care and weekend services, which were being developed in Orkney with the help and involvement of Alzheimer Scotland.

However, the positive examples of service innovations are balanced by reports of less developed local services in other parts of the country. With that in mind, I was delighted to approve the round two focus for the support group. That focus includes the development of co-ordinated inter-agency approaches to dementia services and support.

Services are improving, but there is no doubt that they need to improve further. Once again, Alzheimer Scotland's recently produced document, "Planning Signposts for Dementia Care Services", offers the statutory agencies real

pointers on how to improve such services. I concentrated on that document in the members' business debate that I secured last year, to which Cathie Craigie referred. I remember that one of the features of that document was the importance of early-stage therapeutic services, including drugs, and early-stage support services, including information. Early diagnosis is also important, as Cathie Craigie said, and we are determined that there will be a better understanding of the disease among professionals and service providers so that that can happen.

Alzheimer Scotland's document is a useful and comprehensive document against which the planning agencies can measure their services and I commend Alzheimer Scotland for its production. Reference will be made to it in the forthcoming report from the chief medical officer's group on health care and older people. He will also address the charge of agism to which Adam Ingram referred.

Several people mentioned the carers strategy. I remind members of the extra money that is going into that strategy and of the 22,000 extra weeks of short breaks that will, I am sure, be welcomed by the carers of people with dementia.

Drug treatment and postcode prescribing featured prominently in the debate. I understand and share the concerns of members and of Alzheimer Scotland. People rightly find it unfair that access to a particular drug or treatment should be determined by where they live. As I said at the Health and Community Care Committee this morning, the Executive is committed to tackling postcode prescribing. We have an extensive work agenda to ensure that all patients have access to consistent, high-quality NHS services no matter where they live.

Richard Lochhead: Will the minister explain how he intends to ensure such access to services in the Grampian Health Board area? As has been said, only 4 per cent of suitable patients there get new treatments. Even when the specialists to whom Richard Simpson referred have recommended that the drugs be prescribed, the GPs cannot do so because of the £25,000 limit on their budget.

Malcolm Chisholm: As I was about to say, we should welcome the guidance from the Health Technology Board for Scotland. That body has been somewhat criticised in the past few days, but it has put a Scottish angle on its work and has developed the NICE guidance in relation to the possibility of GP prescribing in rural areas that do not have access to specialists. As Richard Simpson reminded us, the thrust of the guidance was that it should be specialists who do the prescribing. That is beginning to happen in Grampian but I accept—as today's report

indicates—that there is wide variation in the amount of money that is being provided for new drugs. I think that all health boards are now providing some money, so nowhere are the drugs not used at all. However, there is clearly room for improvement. Richard Simpson also referred to the Forth Valley Health Board area. I note that a short-life working group there has produced proposals. I hope that that will lead to improvements in the amount of prescribing in that area.

Mrs Margaret Ewing: Will the minister give way?

Malcolm Chisholm: I am in my last minute, so I had better not. I have many topics to cover and I will be able only to summarise them. The number of topics indicates the breadth of the agenda in terms of what sufferers and their carers need. It also indicates the breadth of the response required. Alzheimer Scotland has always campaigned for free personal care and I pay tribute to the work of Jim Jackson in the care development group.

Mary Scanlon talked about home care services. I accept that there have been problems over a long period. However, the trend has been reversed. I remind members of the £100 million that was announced by Susan Deacon last October and of the £100 million that was announced by Angus MacKay in June. Both those announcements will lead to big improvements in the development of home care services.

The wider joint-working agenda includes single shared assessments and the joint management and resourcing that will come for older people's services next April. Much is being done, but much remains to be done. I shall certainly pay close attention to the various points that have been made today.

I assure the Parliament that we acknowledge the importance of world Alzheimer's day in raising awareness of dementia. We also acknowledge the work of Alzheimer Scotland, which I know will continue to work with us in helping the thousands of people who suffer from dementia and their carers.

Meeting closed at 17:59.

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