

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Thursday 20 December 2001

Session 1

£5.00

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Scottish Parliament

Thursday 20 December 2001

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

Parliamentary Bureau Motion

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): Good morning. The first item of business is consideration of a Parliamentary Bureau motion. I call Euan Robson to move motion S1M-2566, which is a timetabling motion on today's stage 3 debates on the Scottish Local Government Elections (Scotland) Bill and the School Education (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill. Any member who wishes to speak against the motion should press their request-to-speak button now.

I notice that Euan Robson is not in the chamber, so I call on Patricia Ferguson to move the motion.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that for Stage 3 of the Scottish Local Government (Elections) Bill and Stage 3 of the School Education (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill, debate on each part of the proceedings, if not previously brought to a conclusion, shall be brought to a conclusion at the following times (calculated from the time when Stage 3 of the Scottish Local Government (Elections) Bill begins)—

Scottish Local Government (Elections) Bill
Consideration of Amendments - no later than 1 hour
Motion to pass the Bill – no later than 1 hour 30 minutes

School Education (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill
Consideration of Amendments - no later than 2 hours 30 minutes
Motion to pass the Bill – no later than 3 hours—[*Patricia Ferguson.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: As no member has requested to speak against the motion, the question is, that motion S1M-2566, in the name of Patricia Ferguson, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Motion agreed to.

Scottish Local Government (Elections) Bill: Stage 3

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): The next item of business is stage 3 of the Scottish Local Government (Elections) Bill. I make the usual announcement about procedures. First, we will deal with the amendments to the bill. We will then move to the debate on the motion to pass the bill.

Members should have SP Bill 38A, as amended at stage 2, and the marshalled list of amendments, which lists the only two amendments that have been lodged. I have selected both for debate. Members should also have the groupings list, which I have agreed.

The two amendments will be debated in a single group. The electronic voting system will be used for any divisions and I will allow an extended voting period of two minutes for the first division after the debate on the amendments.

Section 4—Pilot schemes for local elections

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call on Peter Peacock to speak to and move amendment 1, which is grouped with amendment 2.

The Deputy Minister for Finance and Public Services (Peter Peacock): The coalition had a Christmas party last night, so I will speak to amendments 1 and 2 quietly.

Amendment 2 has been lodged as a result of issues that Keith Harding raised in amendments at stage 2. We undertook to lodge an amendment at stage 3 that meets the terms of Mr Harding's amendments and does not artificially constrain ministers as to what can be approved in the pilot schemes under the bill.

Amendment 2 makes it clear that the bill will allow pilot schemes to make special provision for wheelchair access, appropriate aids for the blind, voter information, signage polling cards and ballot papers in languages other than English, transport to polling stations, talking machines that explain procedures to the blind at polling venues and a much wider range of provisions that are well beyond the original scope of Mr Harding's amendments.

I am grateful to Keith Harding for raising those points at stage 2 through his amendments. They prompted us to check the provisions of section 4 of the bill to ensure that they are broad enough to let local authorities draw up schemes that will tackle innovative and wide-ranging issues. Mr Harding is not in the chamber, but I know that he agrees that the revised provisions of section 4 meet and go beyond the intentions of his amendments.

Amendment 1 introduces a consequential drafting change.

I move amendment 1.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Not many members have indicated that they want to speak. Those who wish to contribute should press their request-to-speak buttons.

I call on Patricia Marwick.

Tricia Marwick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): Presiding Officer, you have given me my Sunday name again.

I welcome the amendments. As the minister said, Keith Harding lodged amendments at stage 2 and I supported those. The minister has accepted the spirit of the amendments and the SNP will give its support. The minds of the local authorities and the returning officers will be focused on the need to encourage and increase accessibility for young and elderly people and people from ethnic minorities.

However, I deeply regret the wording of amendment 2. I am sure that there are good legal and technical reasons for referring to

“persons of a particular class”

and “any class of persons”, but that grates on me and on a great number of people. I accept the amendments and that there might be a legal reason for such definitions in this instance, but I sincerely hope that this is the last time that amendments come before the Parliament that mention classes of people.

Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con): As the minister said, amendment 2 was lodged as a result of amendments that were proposed by Keith Harding at stage 2. Mr Harding is not with us today but, on his behalf, I thank the minister for his constructive and helpful response. Amendment 2 is useful and will be of democratic benefit to many disadvantaged people in Scotland. I hope that that will be reflected in an increased interest in local government.

We, too, take issue with the wording of amendment 2. As Tricia Marwick said, using terms such as “class” or “particular class” grates. The wording could be much happier. I would like to think that, at some stage—possibly when there is an amendment to the act—some remedial action might be taken. However, the amendment is good and adds to the quality of the bill.

Peter Peacock: I take the point that members have made. I thank them for supporting the amendment, which was lodged in the proper spirit of co-operation between the parties to improve the bill.

Members mentioned the terms used in

amendment 2. The form of words is employed in legislation on a virtually universal basis where the intention is to ensure that powers conferred by the legislation are sufficiently wide to allow tailor-made provisions to be created to meet the needs of particular categories of people. If a different word such as “group” were used, the courts might conclude, given the departure from the more usual expression, that a different and possibly narrower result was intended. I am sure that all members agree that that would be a highly undesirable outcome. Nonetheless, the parliamentary draftsmen will no doubt reflect carefully on members’ comments for the future.

Amendment 1 agreed to.

Amendment 2 moved—[Peter Peacock]—and agreed to.

Scottish Local Government (Elections) Bill

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): The next item of business is a debate on motion S1M-2524, in the name of Andy Kerr, on the Scottish Local Government (Elections) Bill, and one amendment to the motion. Members who wish to speak should press their request-to-speak buttons now.

09:39

The Deputy Minister for Finance and Public Services (Peter Peacock): As usual, a great deal of hard work has been done, not least by the Local Government Committee in its detailed consideration of the bill. I thank that committee, Parliament and the many organisations and individuals who have made a valuable contribution at the different stages of the bill.

The bill has three main provisions: a four-year mandate for councillors; council elections to coincide with ordinary elections of the Scottish Parliament, which will cancel the planned 2002 elections for councils; and provision for ministers to approve pilot schemes to modernise the administration of council elections.

The four-year mandate for councillors is part of the process of providing councils with much greater stability and better planning horizons for the decision-making and policy work that they undertake. The last reorganisation of local government brought in a three-year term. It is widely regarded that that was an error, which we are seeking to correct in order to provide greater stability.

The second main provision in the bill is to make council elections coincide with ordinary Scottish Parliament elections. Although many reservations were expressed in advance of the coincident elections that were held in 1999, the exercise was judged a considerable success in retrospect. In 1999 a significant improvement in votes cast for councillors was achieved. The average turnout, which was in the 40 per cent range between 1975 and 1995, increased to almost 60 per cent in 1999. That increase in the vote for councillors is a considerable achievement, which is at the root of this second proposal.

The proposal helps to give mutual legitimacy to councils and to the Parliament on the question of turnout. In future, no one will be able to say that any tier of local democracy is less legitimate in terms of turnout than would have been the case had the bill not introduced that change. In our view, holding coincident elections strengthens the legitimacy of the local democratic mandate.

The third main provision in the bill is for ministers to be given powers to approve pilot schemes that have been designed to modernise the voting experience and assist with improved turnout. Every member of the Scottish Parliament—and of any Parliament—must be concerned about the decline in voter turnout for all elections. I trust that we can all support anything that will make the voting experience more modern and allow more people to participate.

I have described the main provisions in the bill, which were well rehearsed at the pre-legislative scrutiny stage and through wider public consultation. They were also well rehearsed in the stage 1 debate and during committee consideration. As I have indicated throughout the course of the bill, we have lodged amendments that, with the help of committee input, have improved the bill considerably.

The Scottish Local Government (Elections) Bill is about strengthening local government and the local democratic mandate of councils, and giving councils a stable climate in which to develop, improve and modernise their services.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees that the Scottish Local Government (Elections) Bill be passed.

09:42

Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP): I thank the Presiding Officer for selecting amendment S1M-2524.1. I hope that the selection of Scottish Socialist Party amendments is not just for Christmas, but will be considered throughout the year.

We have had a short bill with a short period of scrutiny. We had a short stage 1 debate and the stage 2 analysis was short. We will probably have a short stage 3 debate as well. Nonetheless, I feel that it is vital that an amendment has been lodged and put before the chamber, because the bill is primarily about democracy. Effectively, 129 of us are being asked to decide to increase the democratic mandate that was conferred on councillors in 1999, when they were voted into office for a three-year period.

I do not think that anyone is opposed to four-year terms of office for councillors—I have not heard anyone voicing opposition to that change. However, I am opposed to introducing a four-year term of office midstream. The only people who are equipped and qualified to confer a mandate upon councillors are the electorate—not 129 members of the Scottish Parliament. It is on that ground that although I do not wish to oppose a four-year term, I wish to oppose the introduction of that term at this stage, by adding an extra year to the democratic mandate of councillors.

Throughout stages 1 and 2, we were told that the aim of the bill was to improve democracy. It was hoped that if the elections for the Scottish Parliament and the local elections were held on the same day, there would be a higher turnout. Evidence was given in the stage 1 debate that there was a higher turnout for the local elections in 1999 than in the previous elections and it was suggested that, therefore, we should support the measure in question.

However, recognition that turnout at the 1999 Scottish Parliament elections was 11 per cent down on the 1997 Westminster elections was missed out, as was the fact that the turnout for the Westminster elections in June this year was the lowest since adult suffrage was introduced in this country. In other words, what we have is a problem of disengagement from the public in relation to politics generally. That will not be resolved by trying to roll all the elections into one and having one big election, rather than allowing proper accountability and scrutiny of the performance of local government.

A number of councillors might be rather worried just now because they think that they will be damaged by the shenanigans of the Scottish Parliament in relation to 2003. They have no responsibility for that big hole in the ground that is supposed to become the Holyrood building. If that continues at the same rate at which it is going now, it will cost us £1 million for every year that we have not had a Parliament. We lost the Parliament 292 years ago and it looks as if it is going to cost £292 million to build a new Parliament. Councillors have nothing to do with that decision, but all levels of politics have been soiled by the shenanigans around that decision.

That makes clear the point that the Parliament was wrong when it voted to have the Parliament building in Edinburgh. The Parliament building should have been in Glasgow, Scotland's most populated city, in the first place. That, of course, was always the demand of that great Clydeside socialist, John MacLean, and deserves to have been taken up by our Parliament.

Councillors have nothing to do with the fiasco that developed around the resignation of the First Minister. In particular, they have nothing to do with the situation that has developed since then in relation to a pension scheme that has caused great disconcert throughout Scotland. I have to say that, Presiding Officer, because it is relevant.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Sheridan, you are moving way off the subject. Will you close, please.

Tommy Sheridan: I am sorry, Presiding Officer, but I disagree that I am going way off the subject.

I make the point that we were told that having

the elections for local council on the same day as those for the Scottish Parliament would improve voter turnout. I am arguing, quite clearly, that a number of factors could work against voter turnout, because people are appalled by what the Parliament has or has not been doing. That is relevant to today's debate. I hope that the Parliament will rescue itself from some of the decisions that have been made and that we ensure that we do not operate a pension scheme, after 13 months, of £700 a week for certain individuals.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I ask you to close, Mr Sheridan. You are a minute and a half over your time.

Tommy Sheridan: I am sorry, Presiding Officer, I thought I had an eight-minute period. Is that not the case?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: No, I am afraid that you are down for four minutes, Mr Sheridan. I ask you to wind up, please.

Tommy Sheridan: With the greatest respect, Presiding Officer, it would have been helpful if you had informed me of that before I started. Normally when we move amendments, we get eight minutes to speak. I apologise for going over time. I will move on quickly. I will not mention the problem with salaries and how that will bring down turnout at the elections.

It is interesting that the argument that was used at stage 1 for four-year terms was that we wanted to move away from the ridiculous decision that the Tories took to introduce three-year terms. The argument was that we wanted to normalise ourselves with the rest of Europe. The rest of Europe has four-year terms, so why do we not have four-year terms? I agree 100 per cent with that argument.

What the Minister for Finance and Public Services and the Executive have to grapple with is the fact that the rest of Europe also has proportional representation. Why do we get only one part of the deal? If we are going to get four-year electoral terms, why are we not getting PR as well? There is no reason for that.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Will you close now please, Mr Sheridan.

Tommy Sheridan: There is no reason why PR should not be introduced for May 2003. If it is not introduced for May 2003, the Liberal Democrats should be ashamed of themselves.

I move amendment S1M-2524.1, to leave out from "agrees" and insert:

"does not agree that the Scottish Local Government (Elections) Bill be passed because it believes that it is important for the health of local government that local elections be held separately from those for the Parliament

and further believes that local government elections should next be held in 2002 since currently elected councillors have no democratic mandate after then."

09:49

Tricia Marwick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): Although the bill contains a number of sensible proposals for piloting projects that try to encourage greater electoral participation, any good intention is completely undermined by the main principle of the bill—to hold council elections on the same day as parliamentary elections. The SNP opposed the bill at stage 1 and will oppose it at 5 o'clock today.

I turn briefly to Tommy Sheridan's amendment and say that I am not particularly in favour of reasoned amendments. I believe that someone who is opposed to the bill should simply vote against the Executive motion. As a result, Tommy's amendment is unnecessary and the SNP will not be supporting it.

The Executive believes that the bill will increase the turnout at local elections. That is no doubt true, as parliamentary elections currently attract larger turnouts. However, such turnouts will not confer any additional democratic legitimacy on local government. Confronted with an additional ballot paper in the polling booth, most people will simply fill it in not out of an interest in the affairs or the remit of local government, but because that is the most obvious thing to do with another ballot paper in the polling booth.

The serious flaw in the Executive's argument is its naive suggestion that an artificially inflated turnout provides an increased mandate for local government. It is quite clear that the reverse is true, and that will have a cost in the form of a democratic loss for the very local authorities for whom the bill is intended. The local agenda will be overshadowed and overtaken by the coverage of national elections. No member of this chamber could seriously argue that local authority issues will even surface, far less be given a decent hearing, in the press mêlée of the parliamentary election campaign. Councillors will not be able to make their case for election or re-election as they will be completely displaced from the agenda by MSPs seeking to make their case.

I make no apologies for returning to the Kerley report, although I know that members will find that uncomfortable. The report says:

"However, the higher turnout could not be claimed as an increased democratic mandate for local government ... In fact, coincident elections would tend to reduce the electorate's focus on local government issues. Conversely, separate elections would ensure that local government issues are at the heart of local government elections: this seems to us an essential part of democracy and democratic renewal."

I see from press reports that the Executive parties are consulting on all the Kerley recommendations. It is a pity that they did not take note of his comments on coincident elections.

The situation faces further confusion in 2003 with the prospect of a referendum on the euro being held on the same day as other elections. It is absurd for three totally different agendas to be considered in the same election campaign. Will national politics and personalities, the on-going question of the euro or local councillors and other municipal matters head the list of press priorities? As for the national agenda, local government will be relegated to the back burner and the gas simply turned off. This bill will diminish the local agenda and undermine local democracy; it is corrosive to the democratic legitimacy of our councils.

I want to address one further point to the Liberal Democrat members of the coalition. The logical time for local government elections is the midpoint of the Scottish Parliament session. If the Liberal Democrats are so confident that they will deliver PR for local government elections, why on earth are they supporting this bill, which could delay the implementation of PR until 2007 when it could reasonably be introduced for elections in 2005?

I see that Mr Rumbles is rumbling.

Mr Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): I have listened carefully to Tricia Marwick's remarks. Is she telling the Parliament that the electorate is too stupid to understand the difference in electing a constituency MSP, a regional list MSP and local councillors? In my constituency, the electorate voted for me as constituency MSP and for a Conservative, unfortunately, as the regional list MSP, and a third of the electorate voted for independence. The electorate has a rich vein of understanding about what it is voting for. Does she really believe that the electorate is stupid?

Tricia Marwick: Mr Rumbles tempts me too far by inviting me to comment on the people who elected him. I am sure that those who did so will reconsider their position for the next election.

I have no doubt about the intelligence of the electorate in Scotland—it is very sophisticated. However, that is not the issue. The question is whether real issues that affect local government will be examined under the system proposed by the bill. That is not going to happen.

If the Liberal Democrats also support the Kerley recommendation of PR for local government elections based on the single transferable vote system, they should oppose the bill. It will mean two different elections with two different PR systems, one for the Scottish Parliament and one for councils in 2007. Such a position is illogical.

The SNP will oppose the bill, as it has already done, and I invite Liberal Democrat MSPs to do so as well.

09:55

Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con): When this matter was first debated, I described the bill as an affront to democracy. I firmly adhere to the same view today. We must be quite frank. This bill is not about improving the quality of local government services or the democratic principle, but about maintaining Labour's Tammany Hall fiefdoms despite its appalling record of failure in Scottish local government.

It is quite ridiculous for the minister to pretend this morning that the bill is being passed for anything other than Labour's electoral advantage. It is also massively hypocritical for him to pretend that he is not trying to secure the massive Labour majorities on councils in the west of Scotland, with all the damaging effects that such majorities have had on local government and its services.

If elections are held on the same day, electors will have great difficulty in separating out the performance of individual councillors, their local authority and the parties in the Scottish Parliament. Although we certainly take much comfort in the knowledge that the coalition will soon be exposed for the appalling failure that it is, councillors will suffer the effects of that when local government elections are eventually held.

What is clear is the total illogicality of the Liberal Democrat position on this issue. The Liberal Democrats have for a long time advanced their well-established and well-articulated arguments for PR in local government elections. However, in the course of Jim Wallace's negotiations with Jack McConnell during the week—the maybe-sometime-never talk about talks—did it occur to neither man that the easiest way of introducing PR in local government would be to ensure that local government elections took place either next year or in four years' time? Surely four years is sufficient time for the coalition to get its act together. The fact is that PR in local government is a pipe dream. It will never happen, because Labour councillors throughout the country will simply not agree to it. Indeed, many Labour MSPs will not agree to it.

The matter comes down to this: Labour hopes to maintain its dominance in Scottish local government, and the bill is a smokescreen to disguise and protect ineffective councils, useless councillors and those whose record of service to their communities will not stand any serious scrutiny.

Tricia Marwick: Although it is true that Labour fiefdoms still exist despite the fact that local

government elections have until now been held on a different day, the argument that the two elections should be held on the same day is bogus unless one supports PR. Does Bill Aitken support PR?

Bill Aitken: If it can be demonstrated beyond reasonable doubt that any proposed PR system would be more democratic and effective than the present one, I would be prepared to consider the arguments. Unfortunately, that has not been demonstrated at all. As members on all sides of the chamber could point out, the fact is that the most important aspect of local government—

Mr Kenneth Gibson (Glasgow) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Bill Aitken: Not until I finish this point.

The contribution that a local councillor makes to his community is an important factor. Kenneth Gibson, for one, was an effective local councillor. If PR was introduced, the link with the constituency member would be lost. That would be very damaging.

Mr Gibson: I thank the member for his praise, which is always welcome. First, does he accept the fact that his argument does not hold for an STV system, in which people compete not only on a party basis but with each other? Secondly, PR enhances turnout. For example, this week at the Portuguese council elections, which used PR, there was a 65 per cent turnout—higher than that at the UK general election.

Bill Aitken: Mr Gibson will be aware that that result was perhaps distorted slightly by the very high turnout in Portimao north, where the performance of the local councillor obviously encouraged people to turn out in greater numbers. It has not yet been demonstrated that, if proportional representation was introduced for local government elections, it would improve not only local democracy, but the level of service that a councillor gives to his constituency.

In conclusion, what Mr Sheridan said in support of his amendment made a great deal of sense. We will not support the passage of the bill.

10:01

Iain Smith (North-East Fife) (LD): I do not intend to take up much of the Parliament's time. All that we have heard this morning is a repeat of the debate that we had at stage 1. The arguments against the bill were not convincing then and they are not convincing now.

Bill Aitken told us that the main reason why the Conservatives will not support the bill is that they have no confidence that they will win any elections in Scotland—at least, that is effectively what, in a moment of truth, he said. He claimed that the

whole purpose of the bill was to enhance Labour fiefdoms, as Labour-controlled councils would be re-elected on the back of Labour's re-election in the Scottish Parliament. I have no great confidence in that prediction. The Liberal Democrats will make gains in 2003, not the Labour party. The Conservatives have no confidence that they will make any gains in 2003—Bill Aitken was accurate in that prediction.

Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Is the member not aware that, in his constituency, at a local by-election for Fife Council, the Liberal candidate lost to the Conservative candidate? Does that not augur well for future elections?

Iain Smith: That is a rather pathetic argument. In by-elections since the general election, the Liberal Democrats have polled more votes than any other party in Scotland has and significantly more than the Conservatives have. We are winning seats from Labour and the SNP, so we are not too worried about the situation. The Conservatives have the St Andrews Central seat on loan; we will win it back in 2003.

Mr Gibson: Can Iain Smith tell us how many seats the Liberal Democrats have won since the general election?

Iain Smith: On the day of the general election, we won the seat in mid-Kinross, as Kenny Gibson may recollect.

Tricia Marwick continues to make the same arguments against the bill. She seems to suggest that the electorate cannot distinguish between the performance of local councillors and local councils and the performance of the Scottish Parliament. There is no evidence to back that argument up. Indeed, there is significant evidence that people make different voting decisions in local and national elections that are held on the same day. In England and Wales, local government and general elections are almost always held on the same day; the evidence shows that people there vote differently in the local government elections. The evidence from the 1999 elections in Scotland also shows that people voted differently in the different ballots. The differential between the Scottish Parliament election results and the local government election results was about 17 per cent. Indeed, the figure was higher in certain areas. For example, in Perth and Kinross and in Moray, the electorate were capable of throwing out inefficient, unacceptable SNP councils while continuing to support local SNP members of Parliament, who did quite well.

Bruce Crawford (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): Will Iain Smith give way?

Iain Smith: I do not want to take up any more time. The member in mid-Kinross was well

defeated in the by-election.

Tommy Sheridan's speech was especially disappointing. He could have commented usefully on why he thinks that the bill is unacceptable for local government. Instead, he gave a party-political rant against the Scottish Parliament. That was not a helpful contribution to the debate.

The Liberal Democrats support the bill. It will help to enhance the role of local government. When we fight the elections, people will be able to distinguish between what the Scottish Parliament is doing and what local authorities are doing. The Liberal Democrats said that we would make progress on electoral reform; a commitment to that progress has now been secured. A white paper will be published by Easter and legislative proposals will be issued by the end of the summer. PR for local government elections will be in place by 2007.

10:06

Trish Godman (West Renfrewshire) (Lab): I have said it before, but it is worth saying again: we seem to be passing legislation at break-neck speed. That is the experience of the Local Government Committee. I find the rush to legislate slightly worrying, especially given the ominous absence of a review system. That issue needs to be addressed. Nonetheless, the bill makes good sense. It is important that we change the timing of local government elections, as that will, I hope, at least increase the turnout.

The bill has some deficiencies, but ministers and Executive officials have shown good sense in their response to the committee's concerns. It is good to know that, at a time when many observers are expressing concern over what they call passive or weak Parliaments, ministers are listening to some committees. I am pleased to say that the Local Government Committee is one of those. The amendments that were lodged by Keith Harding have been accepted. However, I agree with Tricia Marwick and Bill Aitken that the language in one of them is appalling. It is not acceptable to say "a particular class" in this day and age. I am sorry that I did not spot that phrase sooner. Had I done so, the amendment would not have got off the starting block.

I am still sceptical about the pilot schemes, but I acknowledge the need to tackle the disturbing decline in the turnout at both local and national elections. Of the 25 councils that responded to the Local Government Committee, 19 agreed that we should have synchronised elections.

However, the problem of voter disaffection, which is allied to people's perceptions of politicians and Governments, is deeper than any concerns about the place or the time at which the

electorate are asked to vote. Mike Rumbles is right to say that voters are not stupid. Clear evidence was presented to the committee that, in 1999, people voted differently in the Scottish Parliament election from how they voted in the local government election. They are more than capable of doing that again.

One area needs to be cleared up. The pilot studies will have to include voting for the Scottish Parliament as well. We cannot have people voting in Safeway in local elections and then having to go to the local school to vote in the Scottish Parliament elections. I ask the minister to clarify how far that idea has been progressed. I also ask him to keep the Local Government Committee abreast of councils' interest in the pilot studies, what those studies entail and their results, which we await with interest.

Evidence that we have received from witnesses and councils suggests that the bill will be welcomed. I am sure that the administration problems that have been highlighted will be dealt with appropriately by returning officers and chief executives. Such problems include deciding when to count the votes, the fact that the count will take place over a holiday weekend and the need for publicity to advertise the fact that, as in the previous election, there will be three votes rather than two.

It is our task to ensure that we pass legislation that affects constituents' lives more directly. Our goal is to persuade electors of the genuine worth of the Parliament and of our contribution in making it work. If we can do that, people will be encouraged to come out and vote. I urge members to support the bill.

10:09

Mr Kenneth Gibson (Glasgow) (SNP): It is important that the local government ballot dominates local government elections. The difficulty in holding two elections on the same day is that the focus would depend on the perceived electoral chances of the political parties in specific contests. For example, if the seat were a marginal parliamentary seat, one would expect at least one of the parties to put more emphasis on the parliamentary issues to the detriment of local issues. In the same situation, a party with no chance of winning the parliamentary seat might put more effort into the local election. That would cause a distortion of approach across Scotland.

In the previous debate on the subject, Iain Smith talked about the Liberal Democrats continuing to campaign on local issues. Perhaps he could clarify what local issues the Liberal Democrats campaigned on in Ayrshire, where the party contested none of the 92 seats.

There are great differences in the way in which people vote in different elections that are held on the same day. However, that is often because different political parties contest different elections. As was mentioned in our previous debate on the subject, in 1999 the Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives both failed to contest half the seats and Labour failed to contest 262 of them. That demonstrates the fact that the range of candidates in local elections is often completely different from that in other elections.

Iain Smith said that he did not want this debate to rehash previous debates—although he went on to rehash what he had said previously—so I will raise a new issue: voter registration. Tommy Sheridan mentioned automatic registration, which is an important issue that the Executive should consider. However, there should also be automatic deregistration. Of the 608 registered voters in the Tarfside Oval multistorey flats in Pollok, only 118 voted in the Westminster election. However, further examination showed that, although only four of the flats have no registered voters, 66 of them were empty before the election. In some two or three-roomed flats, five surnames are registered. Particularly in areas where there is a high turnover of residents, percentage turnout is often far higher than the archaic registration system suggests that it is. We should address that.

Civic education must also be addressed. Furthermore, when examining anomalous voting patterns, we should remember that tactical voting might have a part to play.

I support a lot of what Trish Godman said and agree that the minister has a duty to clarify some issues. In the previous debate on the subject, the minister said:

"if Scottish Parliament and local government elections are to take place on the same day, the same rules should apply to both sets of elections".

The SNP agrees with that. The minister continued:

"The Secretary of State for Scotland has indicated that, in relation to future Scottish Parliament elections, it would be sensible to legislate for pilots and provisions similar to those that we are discussing today. The Electoral Commission, together with the Scottish Executive and others, is considering the matter. The issue is not a matter for this Parliament".—[*Official Report*, 22 November 2001; c 4089.]

I hope that, in summing up, the minister will clarify when the matter will be discussed so that there is some coherence on the issue of pilot schemes. The last thing that we want is to have to wait many years between the successful implementation of the pilots for local government elections and their implementation for Scottish Parliament elections. As has been said, that would make a nonsense of the elections, as people would have to vote in two different places.

We think that the elections should be kept separate because we want electors to be able to vote on the records of individual councillors, not just on party-political issues. As the Presiding Officer is indicating that I should wind up, I will do so.

10:13

Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con): It is not only because we are approaching Christmas that, on this occasion, I am giving some support to Tommy Sheridan; I do so on the basis of his amendment, which everyone in the chamber should consider carefully. The amendment says that it is

“important for the health of local government that local elections be held separately”.

On that point, Tommy Sheridan is absolutely right. Local government is important to the lives of everyone who lives in Scotland. Local authorities implement policies and manage huge resources. It is wrong that we should hide local government elections behind the Scottish Parliament elections.

Trish Godman suggested that holding the elections on the same day encourages a greater turnout, but I do not believe that to be the case. Local government elections should be fought on the issues and councillors should stand up and argue their case in their own right and not under the auspices of MSPs.

Tommy Sheridan talked about the proposal to extend councillors' terms of office for another year. That would be absolutely wrong. People in South Ayrshire are crying out for a change of local government and they will get that at the next local government elections. South Ayrshire Council will be the first Tory-controlled council in Scotland for a good few years. That will be welcome.

This is not a party-political debate. Every one of us recognises the role that councillors are expected to play. Councillors should be judged on how well they play that role and their election should not be masked by Scottish Parliament elections.

10:15

Mr Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): It is a pity that the neanderthals in the Conservative party and the SNP are opposing the bill, which is intended to enhance local government, increase voter turnout and reconnect the voter.

Mr Gibson: Will the member take an intervention?

Mr Rumbles: I should be given a chance to get started.

Trish Godman brought to our attention the fact that, in the consultation exercise, 19 of the 25 councils support the bill. There is a great deal of humbug on the SNP and Tory benches as we draw close to Christmas. Tricia Marwick gave us a great deal of humbug about trusting the people. However, I believe that the SNP does not trust the people; it believes that people do not understand the system and are unable to operate it properly. The SNP's humbug on that point is quite amazing.

I normally expect humbug to come from the Conservative benches and I was not disappointed today.

Mr Gibson: Is Mr Rumbles saying that, before 1999, when the Liberal Democrats opposed holding joint elections, they were expressing contempt for the electorate? Was that humbug? Does he agree with Keir Bloomer, the chief executive of Clackmannanshire Council, who said in a submission to the Local Government Committee that

“The existence of separate elected bodies with their own democratic mandates at national and local levels is a critical component of any pluralist society”?

Mr Rumbles: I have always believed that increased voter turnout is extremely important. The bill will help in that regard.

Dr Sylvia Jackson (Stirling) (Lab): I want to add to Mr Gibson's point. Keir Bloomer also said that there was a bigger issue, which relates to involving the local populations in local democracy.

Mr Rumbles: I absolutely agree with Sylvia Jackson's point.

I would like to get back to the Conservatives—

Mr Monteith: We do not want Mr Rumbles.

Mr Rumbles: The Liberal Democrats south of the border have just accepted 17 defectors from the Conservative party, but I would draw the line at accepting Brian Monteith.

We heard a great deal of humbug from Bill Aitken. If the Conservatives want to increase voter turnout and improve the connection between the voters and the people for whom they are voting, they should support electoral reform in the form of proportional representation for local government. In particular, they should support the single transferable vote system, which, more than anything else, reconnects the voter to the people whom they are electing because it enables the voter to choose the candidates from within the parties rather than having simply to choose the Conservatives, the Liberal Democrats, the SNP or even the SSP. That gives greater choice to the voter and I am astounded that the Conservatives—especially Brian Monteith—oppose giving individuals greater choice.

I am particularly pleased that the Executive is making progress on electoral reform, as outlined in the partnership agreement between the Liberal Democrats and the Labour party and in the programme for government. I look forward to continued progress being made and believe that it is inconceivable that the system that we currently have for local government elections will remain the same after 2003.

10:19

Ms Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP): Mike Rumbles has a cheek to talk about humbug. He must be the biggest humbug in the Liberal Democrats. I expected the rattling of chains from the Ghost of Christmas Past, but he did not get as far as that.

I will make a few quick points. I thank the minister for listening to some of the concerns that were expressed when he came to the Local Government Committee and for taking on board the point about public access and access for the disabled.

Mr Gibson: The member is being too nice.

Ms White: I am told that I am being too nice. Even though we could not all agree that the two elections should be held on the one day, I thank the minister for listening to the committee.

Four-year terms have been mentioned. Everyone wants a four-year term for local councillors. Most people also want a decent wage and a pension scheme for councillors, but the bill does not cover those things. A four-year term is an excellent idea, but the local elections should not be held on the same day as the Scottish Parliament elections.

Mike Rumbles and others raised the question of the voters not being discerning. That is not the issue. The voters are discerning. The fact is that local government issues will be swamped under all the media attention that is given to the national issues that are debated in the Scottish Parliament elections. That was one of the main concerns that came across from councillors and other witnesses.

Mr Rumbles: Will Sandra White give way?

Ms White: Yes, for another bit of humbug.

Mr Rumbles: What about the example of Moray? The voters there returned Margaret Ewing to the Parliament—I notice that she is sitting at the back of the chamber—but will Sandra White remind us what they did to their SNP-controlled council?

Ms White: The Liberal Democrats made a point about a 7 per cent, I think, difference. I am trying to make the point that nearly every councillor who gave evidence to the Local Government

Committee, whether they were from Labour-controlled councils, SNP-controlled councils or Liberal Democrat-controlled councils, was concerned about media coverage. The point was raised with the minister.

Trish Godman: Will the member give way?

Ms White: I will finish this small piece and then I will let Trish Godman intervene.

The councillors who gave evidence to the Local Government Committee were worried that, in the elections, the coverage that the media—television, radio and the newspapers—gave to the national issues that the Scottish Executive pushed forward would swamp local election issues. That is a point of fact. If Mike Rumbles reads the *Official Report*, he will see that many people raised that issue.

Trish Godman: Will Sandra White give way?

Ms White: I am sorry; I have only a couple of minutes.

I asked the minister to examine that point. Other members of the committee also asked him about that. It was agreed that the issue is a big problem for local government.

Trish Godman: Will Sandra White give way?

Ms White: I am sorry; I am just winding up.

The fact is that the Scottish Parliament pushes forward issues that will swamp local government issues. That is our main concern.

On different voting patterns, some people may vote in supermarkets, whereas others will have to go somewhere else. That point has been raised on a few occasions. The minister must consider that, too.

The reason why the SNP does not support the bill is that local government is for local people led by local councillors. The dual election will not give people the choice that they want. Local government elections will be swamped by national issues.

10:22

John Young (West of Scotland) (Con): It was interesting that Mike Rumbles seemed to prefer talking to the Tories than to Sylvia Jackson. He completely ignored her, and yet the Liberal Democrats have to hang on to Labour to get anywhere in the Parliament. That should be noted.

McIntosh and Kerley both said that local government elections should be held separately from Scottish Parliament elections if council matters were to get proper prominence. That is the key to the debate. The Executive thinks that low turnout means that the electorate do not consider local issues, but the bill will reduce interest further.

Why does Labour want that? It wants it because it thinks that it will give it greater political advantage.

We agree on the four-year term, because that gives councils time to plan. Mention has been made of what might happen if a different type of PR from that used in the Scottish Parliament elections is introduced for local government. That is a fair point, as the different systems could lead to considerable confusion. I wonder about the enumerators who carry out the counts. Consider what happened in Edinburgh Pentlands: hour after hour went by. That was without the complications that the bill could introduce.

We are in danger of concocting elections that are reminiscent of those in the United States, where votes are cast for the local dog catcher on the same day as votes are cast for other positions. With two sets of elections, the electorate will be submerged in even more paper and even more posters. We warn that other elections, such as for community councils, could eventually be tagged on.

The bill is a Labour plot of some magnitude. Labour wishes to give every advantage to central belt and Glasgow Labour councillors. Indeed, the bill has all the symptoms of Tammany Hall at its worst. There are many former councillors in the chamber, but I suspect that the bill could be the first stage of the total abolition of local government before the century is out. Bill Aitken referred to PR in local government. I do not believe that it will happen. The Liberal Democrats are like poodles being led along on the leads of Labour handlers. I would not be surprised if local government is almost eliminated should the Labour party remain the Administration on the Mound.

A higher turnout in the combined election could not be claimed as an increased democratic mandate. Tammany Hall has arrived on the Mound. Members have been warned—particularly Labour members.

10:25

Peter Peacock: I will try to answer that modest and moderate comment in due course.

A great deal of what was said at the stage 1 debate has almost inevitably been repeated. SNP and Tory members still maintain what they consider to be principled opposition. I will pick up a number of points that members have made and respond to them as constructively as I can.

Trish Godman made a point about the terminology in the bill. As I said when I moved the motion, I am sure that the parliamentary draftsmen will listen to what was said on that. She indicated that the proposal for synchronised elections has the support of the majority of councils. She cited

19 councils as wanting synchronised elections. In fact, 22 councils have indicated clear support for the synchronised elections that we propose in the bill.

Trish Godman and Kenny Gibson mentioned the need for the Scottish Parliament elections to follow similar, if not identical, rules to those for any local government elections conducted under the pilot schemes. A working group, which includes the Scotland Office, the Scottish Executive and the Electoral Commission, is considering that with the firm intention of ensuring that the rules are aligned. It is also considering the point that Trish Godman and Kenny Gibson raised about the need to publicise the fact that people will have three votes on election day and not, as was publicised last time, two votes. We want to rectify that anomaly. Officials of the Executive, the Scotland Office and the Electoral Commission are working hard to sort that out.

Trish Godman asked for an assurance that, if the bill is approved, we will report back to the Local Government Committee on the pilots that will be run. That is our intention. We would be more than happy to do that. We want to work out which measures improve turnout and which measures do not.

Tommy Sheridan confused me with his speech. He was obviously confused, too. The fact that Phil Gallie supported him is probably great testimony to the fact that his speech was confused. Tommy Sheridan indicated that he supports a four-year term, but he opposes the bill that will create one. He also said that he is concerned about turnout, but he chooses to oppose the measure that will maintain turnout in local government elections comparable to that in the Scottish Parliament elections. He rightly indicated that there is a general concern about declining turnout. That is exactly why the bill provides for pilot schemes, which will allow us to experiment to ensure that we can increase turnout. He will oppose the bill, however, and we must leave him hanging in that confused position.

Tricia Marwick and others said that the bill would mean that local authority elections were swamped or overtaken by the Scottish Parliament election. There is no evidence for that. In fact, the evidence runs in the opposite direction. The alternative to the bill is to have local elections at the mid-term of the parliamentary session. All the evidence is that people, including members of the political parties that are represented in the chamber, increasingly seek to hijack such elections and turn them into national referenda on the Government of the day. I suspect that almost every political party has been guilty of that at some point. Political commentators make the point that, as voters in such elections have a chance to cast their vote on the

Government of the day, they might avoid local issues.

Mr Gibson: My intervention does not relate to the point that the minister is making, but I am concerned to ensure that he touches on the issue that I raised about automatic registration and deregistration. Will he consider that point, as an accurate electoral register could enhance turnout?

Peter Peacock: It is clearly desirable to have the most up-to-date register possible. The points that Kenny Gibson raises are being considered by those who are responsible for those matters.

There is simply no evidence that local elections, if held on the same day as the Scottish Parliament elections, will be dwarfed. The opposite is the real concern: local elections are increasingly hijacked for national purposes.

The purpose of the bill is to indicate to people that they will have three votes on the day: the first-past-the-post vote and list vote for the Scottish Parliament election and a vote for a councillor. I am confident that that will happen. It will then be possible to separate out the arguments about why people should cast their votes in certain ways. What are the attributes and responsibilities of the different levels of government?

Bill Aitken and John Young were patronising about the ability of the voters to discern the difference between a first-past-the-post vote, a list vote and a local election vote. There is no evidence to support the Conservatives' patronising view that the voters will be too confused to exercise their democratic rights adequately.

As Mike Rumbles and Iain Smith said, there is an average 17 per cent differential in how people cast their vote. People might cast their vote one way in a first-past-the-post vote for the Scottish Parliament elections, a different way for the list vote and another way for the local elections. There is no difficulty in the voters' minds; they are sophisticated people and they understand the democratic process. They are more than capable of coping with the differences in the electoral system that will result from the bill. The bill will strengthen local democracy and the mandate of local councils.

Tricia Marwick: The Kerley report—I refer to it a lot these days—concluded that

“higher turnout could not be claimed as an increased democratic mandate for local government”

if the two sets of elections are held on the same day. Does the minister agree with Kerley?

Peter Peacock: My position is that the alternative to what we are suggesting is worse for local democracy. We could end up with a situation where MSPs are being elected by a turnout of the

order of, I hope, 60 per cent while the other tier of democratically elected government in Scotland is being elected by a turnout of 30 to 40 per cent. That is evidenced by what happened between the 1970s and the 1990s.

What would that do to serve the interests of democracy in Scotland? If one tier is elected by a 60 per cent turnout and another tier is elected by a substantially lower turnout, that would allow one tier of government to say that it is more democratically legitimate than another tier of government. That will not serve the interests of democracy in Scotland. It will certainly not serve the interests of local democracy. We need strong local councils. The councils must be seen to be democratically legitimate. The bill will guarantee that and I encourage members to support it.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes that item of business. Before we move on, I have two announcements to make to the chamber.

This morning, the Presiding Officers received a request from the Executive for an emergency statement to be made today on the NEC situation. We are minded to take that emergency statement exceptionally at 2 pm. A revised daily list will be published in due course.

This morning, we also received a request for an emergency question on the impact on the islands of the Caledonian MacBrayne strike. Again, we are minded to take that emergency question, which will be at 2.25 pm, after the emergency statement.

School Education (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill: Stage 3

10:34

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): The procedure that we will follow for stage 3 of the School Education (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill will be the same as that for the Scottish Local Government (Elections) Bill. The bill is SP Bill 37A. There are only two amendments. Amendment 1 is grouped with amendment 2.

Section 1—Placing requests: children under school age

The Deputy Minister for Education and Young People (Nicol Stephen): I will take amendment 2 first, because it is straightforward. Amendment 2 is consequential to amendment 1 and introduces the concept of a “qualifying” child. The new definition of a qualifying child therefore requires to appear elsewhere in the bill and that is the reason for amendment 1.

For the benefit of members who were not present, I should explain what happened in the Education, Culture and Sport Committee. There was a unanimous vote in favour of an amendment lodged by Mike Russell. That left the minister defeated. The challenge handed down to me was to go away and find new wording and to propose that new wording at stage 3. That is what has been done.

There were two challenges. One was to reach agreement with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities; the other was to simplify section 1. It is fair to say that we dealt with the first challenge successfully and we have done our best with the second. The wording of the bill and of amendment 1 are complex because of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980, particularly section 32 of that act. From our work on the bill, we know that our ability to amend legislation is restricted. That applies to section 2, which deals with the position of assistant head teacher. Other amendments were sought, but they were not allowed because they were outwith the scope of the bill. Similarly, an amendment that simplified the 1980 act would have been outwith the scope of the bill. In time, that sensible step will be taken because the 1980 act is extremely complex in respect of placing requests and the definition of school age.

We have done our best. We had a meeting with COSLA and several senior legal officials from different local authorities. The meeting had to be co-ordinated with the diaries of those people so, unfortunately, it was held on a Monday, which is a constituency day for MSPs. For that reason, members of the Education, Culture and Sport

Committee were unable to attend. It was important to go ahead with the meeting because we had to redraft legislation, which takes time. Our proposed redrafted wording was still complex and difficult to understand, so a further redraft was done at the end of last week. Although someone who picks up amendment 1 for the first time will find it difficult to understand instantly, it is significantly better than it was before.

We reached a clear agreement with COSLA, which was confirmed by Helen Law in her letter of 17 December to the members of the Education, Culture and Sport Committee. COSLA’s main concern was about placing requests for children who are not yet at school and are not of school age. The concern was that in certain circumstances a request for such a child could lead to a demand for immediate entry into a school. It was not the intention to allow early entry into a school. We wanted to make it clear that a request in those circumstances applies only from the next school entry date. The proposed new section 28A(3F) covers that.

The complexity is much to do with the 1980 act, particularly section 32. I will try to be bold and explain the three new definitions of a qualifying child, which are set out in paragraphs (a), (b) and (c) of the proposed new section 28A(6). After I run through them briefly, I will stop. Paragraph (a) is straightforward—the definition of a qualifying child is

“a child of school age”.

The definition in paragraph (b) is a child who is not yet five years old, so is not of school age, but who has started at a primary school. Paragraph (c) relates to a child who is under school age—but not a rising five, which falls under paragraph (b)—whose parents want to make a placing request for the child to start school on the first start date after the child has become four and a half or more. Such a child would be entitled to start school. We have tried to keep it simple by creating the three definitions. Paragraph (c) is complex because it refers to

“subsections (1) and (2) of section 32 of this Act for the purposes of subsection (6)”.

I could try to give more detail on that if members wish. [MEMBERS: “No.”] This morning is perhaps not the occasion for that detail.

Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Will the minister be helpful and also explain the answer to the Schleswig-Holstein question?

Nicol Stephen: I thank Mr Monteith for that offer. I will, however, swerve beyond that and say simply this: we are committed to ensuring that a simple, clear explanation is given not only to councils and individual schools, but to parents and pupils themselves. The proposed legislation

applies to older pupils, who would be well able to understand some of its consequences, if not all its complexities.

My commitment to the Parliament is to ensure that that simple, clear, plain-English explanation is prepared over the coming weeks and is available as soon as possible in the new year. The importance of passing the bill is that it should correct the problem with the current placing requests legislation in time for the start of the school term in August 2002. That will mean that placing requests should be received from the early part of the new year.

I move amendment 1.

Michael Russell (South of Scotland) (SNP): I shall be even briefer than the minister. It is important to remember that the purpose of the bill, particularly of section 1, is to correct a problem that arises from the way the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Act 2000 was drafted. One would have hoped that the bill was correct and would overcome the problem. It is regrettable to note what the Deputy Minister for Education and Young People said in his letter to the committee, dated this week. The letter reads:

"We accept that the law on this point"—

being the same points to which the minister has just referred—

"is unclear and that the Bill as introduced did not take account of this concern."

It is regrettable that the drafting of the bill as introduced did not correct the problem. One would have thought that that would be right, given that it was the sole objective of section 1.

The importance of what happened in committee is that, having heard evidence from COSLA and having seen evidence from local authorities, it accepted that a problem remained. It was unfortunate that, at that stage, the minister was not prepared to accept those difficulties or to enter into dialogue about them and try to get things right. That is why, I think uniquely, all committee members voted for an amendment that I lodged. I do not expect that to happen again, but it did happen—because the committee wanted to see the problem got right. It was in fact COSLA's victory—a victory for an organisation that had come forward with genuine concerns and that wanted to be listened to.

However, I pay tribute to the Deputy Minister for Education and Young People. Having got a bloody nose on that occasion and having defended the indefensible—extremely well, I have to say, and despite the fact that his civil servants looked extremely unhappy—he did everything thereafter absolutely right. I commend him for that. He met representatives of COSLA, he lodged two

amendments that actually work and he consulted extensively to ensure that they were acceptable—extensively even until the last conversation he and I had on the matter last Monday, when I was speaking on a mobile phone while buying a cheese roll in a baker's shop in Lochgilphead. I hope that that was not obvious to the minister at the time.

I am very grateful for the work that the minister and his civil servants have done to get section 1 to the stage at which it should have been when the bill was introduced. We now have a solution that we would not have had if we had passed the bill unamended.

It is important to note that another objection to the bill was voiced by local authorities. There was a fear that section 2, although necessary, does not cope with the issue of assistant principal teachers in schools and the McCrone agreement. The purpose of section 2 is to ensure that, in removing the post of assistant head teacher—I declare an interest, as my wife is one—it is not necessary to advertise deputy head teachers' posts, because that would clog up the entire system. That change is consequential to the McCrone agreement.

There are fears in schools and among the unions and local authorities that a similar change is required with regard to the abolition of the post of assistant principal within departments. There is concern that if that is not done, the McCrone agreement will be implemented in a way that the unions will not recognise as what they agreed to. We have the minister's assurance—I hope that he will reiterate it in his summing up—that that is not the case. Let us hope that it is not. Otherwise, we will have to return with a second amendment bill to change that part of education legislation.

There will be no objections from Scottish National Party members to the two amendments, nor will there be objections to the principles of the bill. This should have been a quick, simple matter, but it has become slightly more complicated than it needed to be. I finish, uncustomarily—as it is Christmas—by paying tribute to the Deputy Minister for Education and Young People for having got it right in the end.

10:45

Mr Monteith: I intend to make an even briefer contribution than Mike Russell's cheesy speech. I wish to put on record my support for the two amendments and my thanks to the local authorities—Glasgow City Council and the City of Edinburgh Council in particular—and to COSLA for their sterling work in pursuing this matter.

Our concern at stage 1 was that there were two, opposing, views on whether the bill met the requirements of amending the existing legislation

successfully. As has already been said, it was due to the committee's perseverance that doubt remained. We put forward the unanimous view that the way to achieve change was to amend the bill, which forced the minister to return with his stage 3 amendments. I pay tribute to the sporting nature in which the minister has accepted that. We intend to support both amendments and the bill as a whole.

Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab): I intend to be equally brief. Having taken the unprecedented step of supporting a Mike Russell amendment, I am grateful that the minister has come to the chamber with these amendments. The bill has involved a mishmash of mistakes. As Mike Russell correctly stated, they arose out of earlier bad drafting of what became the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Act 2000. Members will appreciate why the committee became sceptical when people said, "Yes, but the same people who told us it was right last time, but got it wrong, are the ones telling us it's right this time." COSLA told us again that we had got it wrong.

I think that we have moved the debate forward, but I ask the minister for some clarification on amendment 1. I have a constituency problem relating to the proposed new section 28A(6), particularly nursery classes and nursery education. Some people are moving their children into nursery placements in areas where they will not subsequently send them to school, because of their employment perspectives. That is causing problems for children who would go to local nursery schools but cannot gain places in them. I would be grateful for clarification of the effects of the bill in that regard. I hope that it does not reinforce the current position whereby people cannot progress through nursery into school, which is very important in some of our most rural communities where we have managed to roll out nursery provision.

I support the amendments and I hope that we can support the bill.

Nicol Stephen: I have little to add; members' points have all been well made.

On Karen Gillon's final point, however, I would say that the wording of the bill intends to make it clear that placing request legislation does not apply to nursery schools or nursery classes. We are dealing only with children who are going to attend primary school. Once they are attending primary school, and right through their school career—

Karen Gillon: Will the minister take an intervention on that point?

Nicol Stephen: Surely.

Karen Gillon: Does the minister accept that that

matter requires further consideration? We are rolling out nursery provision to enable children to attend nurseries in their local communities, not to have them forced out of those places by people who are pursuing other objectives?

Nicol Stephen: I fully understand Karen Gillon's point. I will give this undertaking: the position of nursery children will be referred to in the clear, simple explanation that we will prepare for local authorities and schools, which will also be available for parents and pupils who are interested in placing requests.

Amendment 1 agreed to.

Amendment 2 moved—[Nicol Stephen]—and agreed to.

School Education (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): The next item of business is a debate on motion S1M-2507, in the name of Cathy Jamieson, which seeks agreement that the School Education (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill be passed. I call Nicol Stephen to speak to and move the motion.

10:50

The Deputy Minister for Education and Young People (Nicol Stephen): I thank the members of the Education, Culture and Sport Committee for the hard and, as members will have gathered, very detailed work that they have done on this short bill. I would also like to thank those who contributed to the committee's effective scrutiny of the bill, above all the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and those authorities that raised the important issue that we have just debated, but also the teacher organisations, which made various points relating to section 2.

Mike Russell referred to section 2. If there had been an opportunity to address in the bill the wider issues that he raised, we would have considered doing that. We are still considering the position of assistant principal teacher. We will work closely with COSLA and the teacher organisations to ensure that the system is as straightforward and as smooth running as possible.

I thank officials of the education department and the Scottish Executive legal and drafting teams, whose commitment to the redrafting of section 1 has been extremely high. Their route to a successful conclusion of the bill has at times been difficult, but without them we would not have achieved the solution that we have reached today.

This is an interesting bill, because all members agreed on the policy. At issue was how to deliver that policy successfully and how to ensure that we avoided making the mistake that, collectively, all of us made in the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Act 2000. I want to put on record the fact that at stage 2 and, indeed, throughout the progress of the bill, no one representing the Executive was trying to defend the status quo and the original wording of the bill. I was certainly not doing that. However, we had concerns about Mike Russell's amendment, which it would be fair to describe as a place holder to ensure that the Executive came back with substantial changes to the bill. We have done that. Because of the work that was done at stage 1 and, in particular, at stage 2, the bill is leaving stage 3 in much better shape.

I have considerable speaking notes to assist me

through the rest of the bill, but in a spirit of good will and consensus I will stop there.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees that the School Education (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill be passed.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: In a continuation of that spirit, I remind members to limit their speeches to three minutes. I will write to Tommy Sheridan about the issues that he raised with me earlier this morning.

10:54

Michael Russell (South of Scotland) (SNP): I have only one point to make. The journalists who this morning lambasted members of this Parliament for their lack of work and ability may want to focus on this bill as an example in microcosm of how the Parliament works. As a former member of the consultative steering group, you, Presiding Officer, will also have enjoyed observing the progress of the bill.

The bill deals with a comparatively minor matter and should not have been contentious. It seeks to correct one error and to get something else to work. It managed to bring disparate political groups together on a committee, out of concern for a problem that had been brought to them by an outside organisation during scrutiny of legislation. Through debate and through the use of strong-arm tactics with the minister, the bill has been improved and will, I believe, be agreed to unanimously by the chamber.

What will the bill do? It will help people considerably. Many parents have had difficulties with placing requests. The bill will resolve some real constituency cases with which many of us have had to grapple. It will also help to implement the McCrone agreement, which we hope will improve conditions in schools.

This is an important bill. There were difficulties relating to it and it led to a genuine debate involving the Education, Culture and Sport Committee, all the parties represented on the committee, the minister, the Executive, Scottish local authorities, COSLA and others. At the end of that debate, we have reached a satisfactory conclusion. That is a credit to the Parliament. This is not a major matter, but it is an important one. Perhaps we should talk more about that than about most other things.

10:55

Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I record Conservative members' support for the bill, which we welcome.

The bill solves a number of problems caused by

the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Act 2000. It ensures that the placing requests that so many parents want to make can be made for the categories of children to which the minister referred. Never before have I seen so much work done on a bill at such a late stage. A number of scenarios have been presented and flow charts have been produced to guide us through the complications of this very complicated area.

I will not dwell on the complications. The bill ensures that the principles of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 remain in force and that parents retain the right to make placing requests. The 1980 bill was quite controversial when Alex Fletcher presented it to the House of Commons, but parents' right to make placing requests is now accepted by all parties.

I thank COSLA for its amendment, which became Mike Russell's amendment. Without that, we would not have been able to improve the bill. I look forward to receiving support from parents and parents organisations for the work of the Education, Culture and Sport Committee and the minister in securing the passage of the bill.

10:57

Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab): From the Labour benches, I record my support for the bill. I thank COSLA for the work that it has done to try to bring this matter to a conclusion. I also thank the clerks to the Education, Culture and Sport Committee and officials of the education department. This was a particularly complex and detailed matter that at one point could have gone either way. We have moved the issue forward and improved the situation. When people in Scotland make placing requests, they will welcome the fact that legislation has made that easier for them. Local authorities will not be subject to the legal challenges that they were worried about at the beginning of this process.

This has been a positive and helpful experience for us all. I hope that the Parliament will see the bill through today and that it will be enacted by the new year.

10:58

Ian Jenkins (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): I echo the minister's thanks to everyone involved in the scrutiny of the bill, both inside and outside the Parliament, including COSLA and the clerks to the Education, Culture and Sport Committee.

This is a positive bill and tidies up placing requests legislation. As Brian Monteith said, placing requests have become part of the way in which the Scottish education system works. To begin with, they were controversial. I look forward

to a time when there are fewer placing requests and when all parents want to send their children to the school that is closest to them because of its high standards. In the meantime, the freedom that placing requests offer is important and we must get the relevant legislation right. The bill takes us forward in that regard. Like the minister, I regret the tortured language that we have ended up with, but that is bound up with the way in which things work.

Implementation of the McCrone agreement is important to the whole teaching profession. We do not want unnecessary bureaucracy to prevent smooth progress on that front. The issue of assistant principals must be examined and aspects of the implementation of the McCrone agreement will require much negotiation. However, we do not want bureaucracy to get in the way of that. As Mike Russell said, the system should not be gummed up by unnecessary advertisements.

The Scottish Parliament has done a good job with the bill. I am grateful to the minister for taking a responsible and good-humoured approach to the committee's niggling about the bill—it is important that that relationship is maintained. I appreciated his crystal-clear account of the bill as it now stands.

The Liberal Democrats support the bill and I hope that it will go forward happily.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Minister, do you have any final comments or sentiments?

11:00

Nicol Stephen: I thank members for their kind words. I waive my right to say anything further.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We have made extremely good speed and have now concluded this morning's business. I remind members that there will be an emergency statement on NEC Semiconductors (UK) Limited at 2 pm, followed by an emergency question on the Highlands and Islands and Caledonian MacBrayne at 2.25 pm.

11:01

Meeting suspended until 14:00.

14:00

On resuming—

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr Murray Tosh): Before we move to this afternoon's business, I wish to notify members that it is anticipated that this afternoon's business might be concluded earlier than scheduled. As a result, it is likely—subject to the agreement of the Parliament—that decision time and the members' business debate that follows it may be taken before 5 pm.

Members will note from the revised business bulletin that was published at lunchtime that it has been agreed that there will be an emergency ministerial statement on NEC Semiconductors, followed by an emergency question.

NEC Semiconductors

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The next item of business is an emergency statement by Wendy Alexander, on NEC Semiconductors. The minister will take questions at the end of her statement; there should therefore be no interventions.

14:01

The Minister for Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning (Ms Wendy Alexander): NEC's announcement on Tuesday that it plans to mothball its semiconductor plant at Livingston is most regrettable. The news has been a devastating blow for the work force, especially at this time of year and coming, as it does, hard on the heels of the Motorola closure. I made a commitment in relation to Motorola to do everything possible to help. I make the same commitment to do everything possible to assist NEC workers and, indeed, others who might be affected. I would like to take this opportunity to offer details of how we intend to deal with the situation at NEC, and to announce additional funding for West Lothian in recognition of the very significant shocks the local economy is having to absorb.

As many members know, NEC has a long association with Scotland. The company restructured earlier this year; about 600 jobs were shed in the summer. At that time—this was the position until very recently—we understood that that was necessary to safeguard the long-term future of the plant. Since July's downsizing, officials have met the company regularly both in Scotland and at the company's headquarters in Tokyo. The then First Minister visited the company in October and last week I instructed a senior official to travel to Japan to meet the company at the highest level. Our ambassador in Tokyo also met the company president.

As members know, market conditions for the electronics sector have continued to deteriorate. The reality is that the July downsizing and refocusing of activities has not achieved the outcome that was intended for the Livingston operation. NEC has taken a commercial decision to mothball the Livingston plant, although the company remains committed to Scotland. If the market improves, NEC has undertaken to review its position. Obviously this is a huge blow for everyone who is affected: the people who work at NEC; their families; indeed, West Lothian as a whole. NEC has stressed to me that the company's decision is in no way a reflection on the skills and commitment of the work force. Rather it is an outcome of there being more adverse market conditions than were anticipated.

Today, the Executive is acting. I am announcing the steps that we will take to assist the people of West Lothian. NEC has advised me of its intention to provide strong leadership in the matter. It has indicated that it will continue to work closely with agencies, through the PACE—the partnership action for continuing employment—arrangements; in other words, the rapid response team, which is being led by Scottish Enterprise Edinburgh and Lothian and has been in place since July. That work involves a range of partner agencies, including the Employment Service, the Benefits Agency, careers Scotland, West Lothian Council, and Coutts Outplacement International, which has been appointed by NEC to deliver outplacement support. A one-stop shop providing information, advice and support for all those who are affected is already operational.

An immediate task will be to identify the needs of NEC workers. I can announce that everyone who is affected will have help with searching for a job. I can also announce immediate access to training for work and other specialist training as people require it. The completion of the European computer driving licence has proved extremely successful elsewhere in helping employees acquire highly sought-after skills. I intend to stand by the commitment that I made following the Motorola closure to inject up to £10 million into West Lothian. That is why I am pleased to announce that I am providing £6 million for the West Lothian strategic action plan for economic development. That money will be channelled through Scottish Enterprise Edinburgh and Lothian so that we can target it to local needs and priorities quickly and effectively.

The action plan, which has been drawn up by a partnership of local economic development agencies, contains a number of measures to strengthen and modernise the West Lothian economy. It will promote business growth, particularly in high growth sectors, and it will create jobs by broadening the employment base in

West Lothian. There will be substantial investment in tailored training programmes to ensure that everyone is equipped to take advantage of the new opportunities that will be created.

With those measures, I am optimistic that we will be able to turn the situation around. There will not be immediate solutions, but the lessons that have been learned at Motorola mean that we can draw comfort from the fact that, less than six months after the first Motorola redundancies, almost three quarters of the Motorola workers have already gone on to employment or training. What were the key factors in that success? The skills and experience of the work force have certainly been key, as have the resilience of the local economy—where the level of unemployment today is no higher than it was a year ago—and the training and employment opportunities that the local response team provides. All those factors are relevant to the situation that now faces NEC.

Some members might expect me, or press me, to announce another task force. I do not intend to do that for the following reasons, which I hope have become apparent from what I have said so far. There is already an effective NEC local response team in place and there is already an effective partnership between the local development agencies. The West Lothian action plan partnership has produced a clear plan of action for boosting the local economy, with priorities that from today have £6 million of new funding to support them. We will work with the partnership to progress that plan.

In more general terms, the recently launched electronics action plan aims to help the industry shift from high-volume to high-value manufacturing and product development. More than £30 million will be invested in that sector over the next two years towards those aims.

In conclusion, 2001 has been an incredibly hard year for West Lothian. The cumulative impact of closures has undoubtedly had a severe impact on the confidence of the area, on individuals and their families, on the local community and on businesses. They have all been affected. Today, I want to offer reassurance that we will do everything that we can to secure not only a quick recovery for West Lothian, but long-term economic stability.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The minister will now take questions on the issues that were raised in her statement. I intend to allow about 15 minutes for questions, after which we will move on to the next item of business. It would be helpful if members who want to ask a question were to press their request-to-speak buttons now. Let us have sharp and concise questions. I call Andrew Wilson.

Andrew Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP): I am sure that the minister will agree that the situation in West Lothian is devastating, because it deals families a dreadful blow at what should be a time of joy for everyone. Will she outline exactly what she regards as being the role of Government in this context? At what level does she believe Government should best administer the situation? What does she plan to do for the business and transport infrastructure in West Lothian to ensure not only that the problem is alleviated, but that wealth creation in the area can be boosted in the long term?

Does not she feel that the Scottish economy has stumbled from crisis to crisis over the past four years, if not during the entire post-war period? When the dust has settled, will she reflect on the fact that our economic performance is utterly mediocre and that we are in continuous economic decline? In the year to June, wealth creation grew eight times faster in the UK than it did in Scotland. Is not it the case that this week's announcements only add to the gravity of that absolutely desperate situation? Does the minister agree that the performance of the Scottish economy is utterly unacceptable and that the current situation signals a time of crisis?

I do not doubt the minister's intention to do good for the Scottish economy, neither do I doubt her ability, but is not she tired of administering sticking plasters to a gaping wound rather than powering up the engine of growth that should drive the people of this nation towards success instead of towards continued economic decline? There have been too many moments like this, and that cannot go on.

Ms Alexander: I do not want to turn the matter of the statement and debate into a political football, although Andrew Wilson invites me to do so. The important thing is that the unemployment rate in the West Lothian economy is currently lower than it was when Motorola announced its closure plans. As that is partly due to the resilience of the wider travel-to-work area, Andrew Wilson's substantive point about the need to strengthen the transport infrastructure is one of which I am very seized. Indeed, I am more seized of the issue because of my new portfolio of responsibilities. I assure members that I have spent the past few days discussing how we can make access to the buoyancy of the Edinburgh economy more straightforward than it has perhaps been in the past.

On the responsibility of Government, the primary issue for Labour members is opportunity of and access to employment. Over the first four years of a Labour Government, 100,000 jobs were created in Scotland. However, the past year has been very difficult for reasons that are beyond anyone's

control, including that of national Government. That said, long-term employment is lower than it has been and interest rates are at the most sustained low level that they have been for more than the member's or my entire lifetime. The same can also be said about inflation. Our commitment to continued growth is evident in the fact that 4,000 more people are in employment in West Lothian today than there were a year ago.

Miss Annabel Goldie (West of Scotland) (Con): I thank the minister for the advance copy of her statement and I associate myself and my colleagues with Mr Wilson's expression of deep concern about the plight that confronts NEC employees. We hope for their sakes that some measure of hope and assistance can be offered.

In her statement, the minister observed that 2001 has been an incredibly hard year for West Lothian. However, 2001 has been an incredibly hard year for the electronics sector in Scotland. We have lost nearly 8,000 jobs and 3,700 jobs have been cancelled or postponed. NEC says that the plant has been mothballed; however, there is surely a danger that the electronics industry is being blackballed. What future does the minister see for the electronics industry in Scotland and the retention of skills associated with it?

More specifically, the minister mentioned that almost three quarters of former Motorola workers have already gone on to employment and/or training. I think that members will want to know what proportion of the three quarters are actually in work.

Ms Alexander: I do not have the full figures in front of me. However, I recall that more than 50 per cent of the workers are already in employment and that between 50 per cent and 75 per cent are in training. That figure is significant. The hope for the electronics industry is its ability to reposition itself and the skills of the individuals within it. In the past year, we extended the modern apprenticeship scheme to adults of all ages and recently people in the electronics sector have formed one of the largest take-ups of the scheme, which is allowing them to retrain for higher-value-added parts of the sector.

As for the sector in general, we published the electronics action plan earlier this year. The plan has three elements. The first is the development of skills and retraining, and I have mentioned the £30 million that will be available for that over the next few years. The second element of the plan is development of the supply chain. NEC is concerned about some of their upstream suppliers and the need to globalise suppliers in electronics that have their headquarters in Scotland. Because electronics companies source on a global basis, they must supply on that basis.

The third element of the plan is to grow our research and development capability in Scotland. I know that the member has a particular interest in matters such as the proof of concept fund, the Scottish Enterprise fellowships and the desire to build research and development institutes that are specifically linked to areas of strength in the Scottish economy. For example, the Alba Centre has been a significant recent development in West Lothian and it continues to prosper, despite the short-term difficulties of the downturn.

Tavish Scott (Shetland) (LD): I want to associate myself with remarks that were made by the minister and Annabel Goldie, and I am pleased to hear about the progress that the minister is making on the matter. How will the £6 million that she has announced for the West Lothian strategic action plan be spent? Furthermore, on her previous point about the commercialisation of research at universities throughout Scotland, is there any possibility of finding out how more of that work can be used to the advantage of small businesses generally?

Ms Alexander: I shall lay out some of the ways in which the £6 million is being spent at the highest level. First, Lothian technology assistance is providing assistance to local companies to access and adopt new processes and to achieve greater levels of research and innovation.

Secondly, almost £1 million will be aimed at marketing West Lothian as the Cambridge of the north. The Alba Centre is really about saying that there is a research and development capability in central Scotland.

Thirdly, we need more high technology business units. One of the problems for spin-outs in the West Lothian area is that the right sort of high technology spin-out business units are not available. That area will be the beneficiary of about £2.5 million.

More generally, on the training side, the West Lothian business learning network will focus on training in information and communications technology so that the European computer driving licence will not be the only qualification that is on offer. That training will receive funding of just under £1 million.

There are a number of other training measures related to ICT and the areas in which we know there are the greatest labour market pressures in Edinburgh. I am thinking particularly of the finance sector, the health care sector and the retail sector. Those measures will benefit from about £0.5 million.

Bristow Muldoon (Livingston) (Lab): The NEC plant lies partly in my constituency and partly in that of Mary Mulligan. I associate myself with the minister's remarks about the impact that the

announced closure will have on many thousands of families.

I recently met the strategic action plan group that drew up the West Lothian action plan. That group would welcome a continuing partnership with the Executive in the plan's implementation. Will the minister give a commitment to that?

The problems that we are experiencing in West Lothian are not confined to West Lothian. They are the result of a global problem, and the job opportunities that are provided in West Lothian are available to people throughout central Scotland. Does the minister recognise the importance of restimulating the West Lothian economy as a driver of the whole of central Scotland's economy?

Does the minister agree with one of the key recommendations of the strategic action plan, which is that we need to improve extensively the transport infrastructure that runs through West Lothian, especially the connections with Edinburgh?

Ms Alexander: It is significant to record this while all members are here. The West Lothian action plan has been drawn up through an exemplary partnership between local agencies. We talk often about partnership working on economic issues. There has been an exceptional partnership, which has come up with a list of measures that commend themselves very strongly to the Executive. That is why—although there are more people in work in that local economy now than there were a year ago—we still thought it right that £6 million should be allocated to plans to reposition the West Lothian economy.

In order to reposition that economy, we are considering how we can strengthen educational provision in the area. Members might recall that, in response to the Motorola closure, we allocated extra money to West Lothian's further education activities. We want to strengthen that initiative.

We share the view that there is a need to examine the transport infrastructure. Members might be aware that three multimodal studies are centring on the M8 corridor, the A8 corridor and the M74 corridor. The study on the A8 corridor is focusing on how travel congestion problems in the west of Edinburgh can be addressed so that the Edinburgh travel-to-work area will become larger and more easily accessed than at present. Over the past few days, I have been involved in discussions with the various rail organisations, City of Edinburgh Council and other interests to get that agenda moving. We will have a chance to debate that work when the multimodal studies are published.

Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP): Is the minister aware that West Lothian has now lost 10,000 exporting and manufacturing jobs since October

1999? Those were direct job losses, but not only is direct employment affected; indirect employment is affected.

The minister's statement refers to the allocation of £10 million to West Lothian after the closure of the Motorola plant but, in a recent written answer, she said that only £4 million had been allocated. Is the £6 million that she is announcing today additional to the £10 million that was announced after the Motorola closure or is it an allocation and release of the money that was identified in the summer?

Ms Alexander: I note the difficulties that manufacturers have had in some areas recently and I think that it is important that we examine what has happened in individual sectors. Some areas of manufacturing are doing particularly well and other areas are experiencing difficulty. One of the areas of difficulty has been the semiconductor industry, which has gone from an uplift of 65 per cent to a downturn of 30 per cent. That represents a swing of 95 per cent worldwide in the past 18 months. That has driven many of the difficulties that we have seen in the sector.

That said, it is important to recognise that direct and indirect employment in West Lothian has increased by 4,500 in the past year and that unemployment there is at its lowest point for a decade. That is a result of our getting the fundamentals right in recent years.

The money that is being allocated today is money that we said we wanted to devote to the area following the closure of Motorola. We invested for Motorola workers £3 million of the £10 million that was announced and then—this has never been brought to members' attention—brought to bear from within the resources of other agencies a matching sum. In total, about £6 million has been spent directly over the past six months, half of which came from the £10 million that we announced and half of which came from other organisations that were working in the area. That has left us with a net balance of £7 million, almost all of which we are allocating today.

Mr David Davidson (North-East Scotland) (Con): What actions will the minister be able to initiate to attract new employers to the area to take advantage of the skilled workforce? How might they be used in other parts of Scotland?

Ms Alexander: I mentioned that some of the money that is being announced today is being spent on the creation of high-technology business units. In the east of Scotland, the availability of suitable property—particularly with short-term leases, which tends to be what high-technology companies want—is a matter of concern. Sometimes leases in the commercial property sector tend to be too long for companies that are

in the early stages of growth.

On spin-outs, we have offered to hold workshops—similar to the ones that were held by the entrepreneurial exchange in the aftermath of the closure of Motorola—to enable workers to set up their own companies. Support for that will be provided by the small business gateway.

At a broader level, there is no doubt that the Alba initiative is key to the attempt to reposition the Scottish electronics industry away from assembly activities towards high-value activities that draw our university research more effectively out of laboratories and into our businesses.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: With apologies to Mr Sheridan and Mr Ingram, I call Alex Neil, whose question will have to be the last.

Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP): Will NEC be asked to match the public sector funding of £6 million, as it should in order to meet its social responsibility? What action is being taken to save the 2,400 Motorola jobs that still exist in Scotland? Does not the latest investment prove that we have for far too long put too many eggs in the foreign investment and electronics basket and that it is high time that we grew indigenous companies in Scotland in a diversified market?

Ms Alexander: I agree with that last point, the sentiments behind which led to this year's merging of Scottish Trade International and Locate in Scotland and the formation of a new organisation that is much more about taking Scottish knowledge to the world than it is about simply attracting assembly activity to Scotland.

Members will be aware that Motorola has announced that it must shed another 9,400 jobs worldwide in the next 12 months, 4,000 of which are expected to be in the semiconductor industry. We are anxious that Motorola should clarify the position soon. I assure Alex Neil that senior officials are in continuous and close contact with senior Motorola executives in Scotland and the United States. We await further news.

That said, I want to do nothing that will raise anxiety levels in Scotland. At East Kilbride in particular, Motorola's work is in the automotive sector, in which demand continues to be more buoyant than in other areas of semiconductor manufacture.

I do not recall what Alex Neil's initial point was.

Alex Neil: It was about the money from NEC.

Ms Alexander: We have asked NEC to make a substantial contribution to the rapid response team. It has employed Coutts Outplacement International as its outplacement agency. From our experience on the Clyde task force, Coutts provides a high-quality service. NEC has not made

clear to me the scale of the contribution that it will make.

I inform members, because they may be interested, that we clawed back immediately the regional selective assistance that had been made available to Motorola. With NEC, we are facing mothballing rather than closure. Members might be unaware that, as a result of the decision, NEC will not carry out any semiconductor manufacture at all in Europe. It is retreating temporarily to the United States, Japan and China, with no alternative European location for a semiconductor fabrication plant. In light of that, we have said that the outstanding amount of RSA, which—I think—is about £2.5 million, will not be clawed back pending its being made clear that the situation is simply a mothballing, and that we can look forward to Livingston being the European location for NEC if the upturns that we anticipate in the semiconductor industry happen.

Caledonian MacBrayne

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): We come now to an emergency question from Duncan Hamilton.

Mr Duncan Hamilton (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what action will be taken in response to the strike action by Caledonian MacBrayne staff and the impact of the strike action on the islands that they serve.

14:27

The Deputy Minister for Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning (Lewis Macdonald): Steps have already been taken by Caledonian MacBrayne to limit the impact of strike action on those communities. The company has increased its Claonaig-Lochranza service from the normal one service per day at this time of the year to a schedule of 14 return services per day. The regular shuttle service between Colintraive and Rhubodach on Bute continues to operate. On both routes, there has been spare capacity on the great majority of sailings so far. We stand ready, of course, to implement plans for connecting bus services should that prove necessary.

We understand that, contrary to some reports, supermarket shelves in Arran and Bute remain well stocked and that there are no problems in carrying food and other essential supplies to both islands.

We recognise that the strike is damaging to local economies and communities. CalMac has, throughout the dispute, made itself available for talks with the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers. I understand that further talks are taking place this afternoon on the company's initiative. I hope that a sensible and affordable solution that is acceptable to the company and RMT can be agreed.

The negotiations are a matter for CalMac and RMT. Our role on CalMac is clear: we provide a pay remit, which has allowed the company to offer increases of up to 3.5 per cent for this year and next year. Other pay groups in the company, including a number that are represented by the same union, have accepted those offers. I urge an early resolution to this dispute to put the interests of islanders first.

Mr Hamilton: The minister says that his relationship with the company is clear. It is: the Executive owns it. Is not it therefore his responsibility to do a lot more? Does he not understand the full impact of the strike on west coast communities and islands such as Bute and Arran? Does he not understand the hammer blow to the tourism industry? Does he not understand

what the strike means to families who are inconvenienced when trying to get home for Christmas? Crucially, does he not understand the intolerable burden for patients who are trying to get to hospital or families who try to visit patients in hospital? The Executive owns CalMac. The responsibility to convene a meeting immediately and stay at the table until there is a resolution lies with the Executive. Surely the last meeting of Parliament before Christmas is the last opportunity for the Executive to face up to that responsibility.

Lewis Macdonald: Of course I understand the impact on the communities that are involved. George Lyon, Allan Wilson and Duncan McNeil, who all have constituency interests, have not hesitated to draw them to my attention. I am as aware of them as the company and others involved are. If Mr Hamilton had listened to my initial answer for its full length, he would have understood that a meeting is taking place this afternoon between the company and the union. That is as it should be.

Yes, Caledonian MacBrayne is wholly owned by Scottish ministers. Nonetheless, it would not be appropriate for ministers to interfere in operational matters such as industrial relations. It is not necessary. As the employer, it has the responsibility to negotiate with its employees. The union has the same responsibility to negotiate on behalf of its members.

George Lyon (Argyll and Bute) (LD): I thank the minister for his replies to those questions.

Last week in the chamber, I asked Mr Macdonald to make contingency plans to be put into action if the strike failed to be resolved. I understand that that has now been done and that talks have been held with Stagecoach to ascertain where coaches could be put on to link Rothesay to Colintraive and Colintraive to Dunoon. We have to hope that those talks do not fail and that a compromise is reached. If the talks fail, will the minister assure all the islanders on Bute that the contingency plans will be put into action and that bus services will be put in place to make sure that there is a public transport option for those who do not own a car?

Lewis Macdonald: I acknowledge the force of that point and I know that, over the past couple of days, a number of buses have been provided by operators of their own volition. That is welcome. We are monitoring the situation closely and, at this stage, we are not aware of any foot passengers being stranded at any of the terminals. Clearly, we would act if that was the case.

Because talks are continuing, we are keeping an eye on developments and the demand. We will act. We are talking with the relevant transport authorities. Contingency plans have been drawn

up, are in place and will be put into action should the need arise.

The Presiding Officer: Before we turn to question time, the chamber would like to welcome His Excellency the President of Croatia, Mr Stjepan Mesić, who is with us today and who will be addressing members later.

Question Time

SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

Justice (Sexual Abuse Cases)

14:32

1. Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it has any concerns following the abandonment in July 2001 of the trial of six men in Ayrshire charged with sexual abuse and what steps it is planning to take to ensure that justice is served in all such cases. (S1O-4339)

The Deputy Minister for Justice (Dr Richard Simpson): The Crown deserted the case of alleged sexual abuse because one of the child witnesses was unfit to give crucial evidence in cross-examination. The decision was based on advice from a child psychologist who was familiar with the child. Clearly, there are lessons to be learned. We must find sensitive ways of allowing vulnerable witnesses to give evidence.

That will not come from a single quick fix, which is why Jim Wallace set up an implementation group to develop the relevant recommendations from the report of the Lord Advocate's working group on child witness support. My predecessor met the two constituency MSPs, Cathy Jamieson and Margaret Jamieson, and the Crown Office met the child's mother. Other initiatives might follow. We will report to Parliament as soon as possible on the outcome of the work.

Phil Gallie: I thank the minister for that considered response. Given the outcome of the case, is he prepared to initiate an investigation into the way in which the Crown went about the decision making with respect to inducing the prosecution? Will he consider recognising the concerns and the possibility that several reputations have been tarnished unjustly? How can we allow those individuals, who have long professed their innocence, to present evidence so that they can prove that innocence? They were debarred from doing that when the court case collapsed.

Dr Simpson: Mr Gallie wrote to us on the subject and pressed the case for a public inquiry, which the Lord Advocate has said is not appropriate. We must consider the implications of the case, because they are significant. It would be helpful if Mr Gallie adopted an approach that took into account the alleged victims in the case. It is of the greatest concern to me that those children will grow up in the knowledge that the case was abandoned.

However, under our criminal justice system, an

accused is presumed innocent until proven guilty in a court of law. In this case, the proceedings were deserted simpliciter—I am told that that is the legal term. Consequently, the presumption of innocence still applies. The Crown is barred from raising a new prosecution against the six accused in respect of the original applications. I believe that they should be satisfied with that, on the understanding that we are examining the implications of the case as a whole.

Margaret Jamieson (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab): Will the minister confirm the offer made by the previous Deputy Minister for Justice, Iain Gray, for his officials to meet some of my and Cathy Jamieson's constituents, which would allow them the opportunity to discuss the issues relevant to them and the decision to abandon the trial?

Dr Simpson: I know that Iain Gray, my predecessor, and the Lord Advocate met Cathy Jamieson and Margaret Jamieson when they were making representations concerning the interests of the accused, who were their constituents. The then deputy minister wrote on 24 October, offering a meeting between a justice department official, the MSPs and the accused to discuss general issues arising from the case. That offer still stands, and I can confirm it today.

Education (Public-private Partnerships)

2. Mr John McAllion (Dundee East) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive how much funding has been made available to local authorities for the appointment of consultants to develop proposals for public-private partnerships in education. (S10-4354)

The Minister for Education and Young People (Cathy Jamieson): The Scottish Executive has not allocated funding specifically for that purpose. We have allocated £5 million across 21 education authorities in order to take forward feasibility studies into possible further school PPP projects. Authorities will have used some of that allocation on external expert advice and some to cover their own costs.

Mr McAllion: Is the minister aware that the PPP proposal for schools in Dundee involves the slashing of Dundee City Council's education budget by 20 per cent, as well as the closure of schools across the city—in particular, the second closure in less than five years of a secondary school in one of the poorest areas of the city—without replacement?

I would prefer it if the minister were able to reject all the PPP proposals falling on to her desk, but in the event that she cannot do so, could she at least assure me that any PPP proposal that acts counter to the interests of the poorest communities

in Scotland will be rejected on the basis that that runs counter to the policies of the Executive?

Cathy Jamieson: I am well aware of John McAllion's interest in ensuring that social justice is at the top of agendas. I can say that 16 local authorities have submitted proposals, which are many and varied and which we will have to examine in great detail. We will need to ensure that they best meet the needs of all children and young people and give young people the opportunity of an education in fit-for-purpose buildings. I want to consider the proposals very carefully indeed before making any further decisions on the matter.

Brian Adam (North-East Scotland) (SNP): Will the minister assure me that the costs involved in hiring consultants will be scored against PPP bids when comparisons with a public sector comparator are drawn? Will she assure me that any bids that come from councils involving not-for-profit trusts will be given equal treatment to the PPP bids?

Cathy Jamieson: I thank Brian Adam for raising the same issue that was raised a couple of weeks ago in relation to how we proceed with this. It is clear that all bids will have to be considered on their merits, and it is clear that all bids will have to be considered on the basis of whether they deliver for children and young people. That is the important issue. I have said it once, twice and now three times in the chamber: the simple solution is for us to assess the bids that come in, to ascertain whether their business cases stack up, to assess whether they deliver for children and young people and to make decisions accordingly.

I am not aware of any firm proposals from any local authority based on not-for-profit trusts. I understand that some authorities may consider that in the future. Of course, we will give that due consideration.

Mr Frank McAveety (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab): Does the minister agree that an accurate assessment of all public-private partnerships is how they deliver for young people in the most disadvantaged areas? I offer the minister the opportunity to come to St Mungo's Academy, in the poorest constituency in the whole of Scotland. I would be happy to take John McAllion along. He could speak to the students about the incredible difference that the school is making to its community in the east end of Glasgow.

Cathy Jamieson: I am aware of Frank McAveety's long-standing interest in this issue and in ensuring that young people in his constituency and throughout Glasgow have the opportunity of a good education. I am happy to consider the experience of St Mungo's Academy to see what we can learn from that. I am sure that my colleague John McAllion will want to do the same.

Let us be absolutely clear about the SNP's position on this issue. In a press release in which it castigates the Executive for trying to ensure that funding is available for projects to advance the best interests of young people, the SNP appears to have its own little private finance initiative: at the foot of the document is an advert for the SNP Visa card. The SNP is interested in party politicking, rather than in the interests of young people in Scotland, which are our main concern.

Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP): On a point of order—

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): Order. If ministers go back to answering previous questions, we will not make progress. Ministers should stick to answering the questions that are being asked at the time.

National Health Service (Equipment)

3. Trish Godman (West Renfrewshire) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive whether the additional money allocated from Her Majesty's Treasury under the recent pre-budget report will be used to initiate a programme of upgrade and renewal of NHS equipment. (S1O-4347)

The Minister for Finance and Public Services (Mr Andy Kerr): In the new year the Cabinet will take decisions on the allocation of the additional resources that Scotland received as a result of the pre-budget report.

Trish Godman: Does the minister agree that the task of those working in the national health service would be made much easier if they had the use of the best modern equipment? That might go some way towards reducing waiting lists, if not waiting times. It is a disgrace that the national health service has to make do with out-of-date equipment. I understand that there is no rolling programme to replace equipment in the NHS. Why is there no such programme? Can the minister assure me that as a matter of urgency he will deal with the failure to replace equipment in the NHS? Will he consider the possibility of introducing a rolling programme to meet future needs?

Mr Kerr: In the pre-budget statement the Chancellor of the Exchequer passed a sizeable amount of money through to Scotland. That is a measure of the United Kingdom economy's success.

I appreciate what the member said about the resources that are required by the health service. The Executive is focused on delivery in the health service. Trish Godman can rest assured that the money to which she referred will be spent on health. That is a matter for the Cabinet to discuss, and I look forward to my discussions with the minister responsible for health, Malcolm Chisholm. I am sure that the money will be delivered to best

effect—real resources for real people and real services delivering for Scotland.

Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP): I believe that Trish Godman was alluding to the fact that in England much of the new money that has been allocated to health will be spent on purchasing private health care. We are looking for a commitment that in Scotland the new money will be spent on public NHS equipment. Will the minister guarantee that, instead of making more money for the private health sector, he will improve the public health service?

Mr Kerr: We should start by focusing on patients, something that Trish Godman tried to do in her question. We need new equipment in the health service that will allow the delivery of much-needed services to the community. The Executive is focusing on that. I remind Tommy Sheridan that per capita spending on the health service is 20 per cent higher in Scotland than it is in England. In the current year we have record investment of £5.9 billion, which is set to rise by £490 million. The member continues to bark from outside this debate, but we are using Scotland's money wisely to deliver services to real people in real communities. We will continue to do that.

Richard Lochhead (North-East Scotland) (SNP): I support Trish Godman's comments. Last year the Grampian health authorities told me that 25 per cent of general medical equipment in the region was beyond its standard life. Along with his colleague Malcolm Chisholm, will the minister carry out an audit of the state of medical equipment not just in Grampian, but throughout Scotland? He needs up-to-date figures so that he can know exactly how much investment is required.

Mr Kerr: The mainstream capital budget for the NHS is double what it was in 1997, which is a measure of the investment that the coalition has made in the health sector. Yesterday's debate on the Finance Committee's stage 2 report on the budget was very interesting. The SNP did not offer any alternatives. It did not tell us what level of taxation it would like to see in Scotland or how it would fill the black hole in the economy of more than £4 billion that would exist under independence.

Dental Practitioners

4. Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive what steps it plans to take to attract independent dental practitioners back into the national health service. (S1O-4351)

The Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care (Mrs Mary Mulligan): I am aware of difficulties in the provision of NHS dental

treatment in some parts of Scotland, including Highland, due principally to staffing shortages. Work is under way nationally to improve the supply of dentists and we are considering a number of proposals for recruitment and retention of dentists that are intended to improve the availability of NHS dental services.

Mr Stone: I thank the minister for her answer. She will recognise the fact that an increasing number of celebs, such as Madonna and Paul McCartney, have their teeth done in my constituency.

Recently, the Scottish Executive gave £130,000 to the Highland area in order to improve dental practices' equipment and premises. Will the minister reassure me that such funding will continue in future?

Mrs Mulligan: I am surprised that my fellow Liverpudlian has to go all the way to the Highlands to receive dental care, but I am sure that that reflects the standards that he finds there.

As far as equipment is concerned, I assure Jamie Stone that we will continue to provide funds for up-to-date dental surgery provision throughout Scotland.

Alasdair Morgan (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP): Given the severe difficulty that faces some people in rural areas in getting dental treatment, is the minister prepared to set herself a target date by which everyone who so wishes will be able to register with a dental practitioner in their own locality?

Mrs Mulligan: A great deal of work is going on to ensure that provision is made for people throughout Scotland, and particularly for those who are in rural areas where there appear to be some difficulties. As I have just taken over my brief, I am sure that Mr Morgan will appreciate that I would find it quite difficult to set targets at this stage. However, I am more than happy to discuss the matter with him in further detail, as a number of strands are being taken up in order to provide dentists for those people. At some stage, perhaps we could have a discussion about when people could expect the target mentioned by Mr Morgan to be met.

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): What action will the minister take when dental screening for school children falls below the statutory obligations that have been outlined by the NHS in Scotland, as is happening in the Highlands? Does she intend to review and upgrade the fee structure for NHS dentists? Finally, I ask Jamie Stone to let the thousands of people who live in the Highlands know how Madonna accessed an NHS dentist, given that they cannot find one.

Mrs Mulligan: I will allow Mary Scanlon to get an answer from Jamie Stone later.

Children's dental health is obviously a priority. If we set good patterns in childhood, we will allow all the people in Scotland to have good dental health in future. Therefore, we have a number of targeted programmes, such as offering toothbrushes to those in the early years and healthy eating programmes for children in school. We are taking a number of measures that will, I hope, improve children's dental health throughout Scotland.

On Mary Scanlon's point about the shortage of provision in the Highlands, I refer to Alasdair Morgan's point and to the fact that the Executive is aware of the difficulties that exist. We are developing a number of initiatives, including the consideration of financial incentives for dentists.

Employment (Ex-offenders)

5. Cathie Craigie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what measures it is taking to integrate ex-offenders into the labour market. (S1O-4377)

The Deputy First Minister and Minister for Justice (Mr Jim Wallace): The Scottish offender employment forum was introduced as a multi-agency approach to improving the employability of offenders through education, training and other opportunities. A Scottish framework document was prepared and launched in May 2000 to assist in the development of local agreements in order to improve the employment prospects of offenders and to make the transition from prison to new deal or other training programmes or employment more efficient.

Cathie Craigie: I thank the minister for his reply and I welcome the employment forum.

Is the minister aware of Liberty Christian Trust, which is an organisation that works with offenders and ex-offenders in the North Lanarkshire, Falkirk and Glasgow areas? Is he aware of the organisation's aims, which are to provide accommodation, employment and purposeful lifestyle training, so that ex-offenders may contribute to and be part of their communities? Will the minister agree that organisations such as Liberty Christian Trust are worthy of Executive support? Will he consider what assistance can be given to the trust so that it can continue its work?

Mr Wallace: Although I am aware that a number of initiatives are being pursued—not least by Apex Trust Scotland—I do not have the details on the initiative that Cathie Craigie has mentioned. I welcome any positive action that is being taken. Most people would recognise that providing opportunities so that people can gain employment when they are released from prison is—along with the provision of accommodation—one of the more

secure ways of trying to reduce reoffending. The Scottish Prison Service and the Executive want to work co-operatively with a number of agencies that are engaged in trying to simplify the process by which people who are in prison can enter the employment market.

Michael Matheson (Central Scotland) (SNP): The minister will be aware that there are two important factors in assisting ex-offenders to get into employment. First, appropriate training opportunities need to be provided while they are in prison. Secondly, there needs to be good linkage between employment agencies and the prison. What resources are being provided to young offenders institutions to assist the development of good links with the employment agencies to ensure that there is investment in the necessary training while the offenders are in prison in the first place?

Mr Wallace: I certainly accept the premise of Michael Matheson's question that it is important that offenders receive training while they are in prison as well as help once they come out of prison. Michael Matheson is probably aware of Apex Trust Scotland's Glasgow innovation fund project, which focuses on prisoners who are both unemployed and homeless. That operates from Barlinnie, Low Moss and the Polmont young offenders institution. The throughcare centre in Edinburgh prison also has Apex involvement. I can also advise the Parliament that the Employment Service has six members of staff who work in Scotland's prisons under the fresh start initiative.

The purpose of those schemes is to assist prisoners with the process of training and, when they come out of prison, to provide aftercare to assist them to get employment. An important part of that is that people who are coming out of prison are provided with near-automatic access to the new deal scheme, so that they have the opportunity to get employment and, one hopes, to be able to lead law-abiding lives.

Languages

6. Irene McGugan (North-East Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what progress has been made in taking forward the recommendations in the report of the action group on languages, "Citizens of a Multilingual World". (S1O-4337)

The Deputy Minister for Education and Young People (Nicol Stephen): The Scottish Executive published its response to "Citizens of a Multilingual World" on 26 September. The response highlighted a wide range of proposals to encourage more language education in all Scotland's schools. Additional funding for language education from next financial year was also announced. We intend to indicate early in the

new year how that funding will be distributed.

Irene McGugan: Is the minister aware that there is widespread misinterpretation of the principle of entitlement to learn a foreign language as set out in the action group report? That has fuelled speculation that, far from being a right to be welcomed, entitlement is an option that may be rejected. Is the minister concerned to know that there is anecdotal evidence that in some schools measures have been put in place to allow pupils to opt out of studying a foreign language? Will he take urgent steps to end that uncertainty? Otherwise, the principle of entitlement will erode, rather than secure, the place of modern languages.

Nicol Stephen: I understand the concern. If the report's proposals were interpreted in that way, I would want to investigate and find out more about that. The report's intention is to stimulate the learning of modern languages and to try to achieve that at a much earlier age. I referred to all schools because modern language learning needs to start happening in our primary schools as well as our secondary schools.

The report's intention and the intention of policy is not to reduce the amount of modern language learning, but the reverse. We want to recognise the growing importance of modern language learning to our links with Europe and with other economies around the world because there is a need for Scotland to do better.

Irene Oldfather (Cunninghame South) (Lab): The minister will be aware of the benefits of immersion teaching of modern languages, which were identified by the action group. Does he have any plans to roll out the Aberdeen pilot project to other areas of Scotland?

Nicol Stephen: The Aberdeen pilot is a very impressive example of what can be done if we focus on the learning of modern languages at an early age. It happens to be in my constituency, but I am sure that every constituency would like to have the benefits of such learning.

It is expensive to deliver that sort of learning and we have to balance our priorities; education authorities have to do likewise. However, we would not have instituted such a pilot and we would not have got involved in stimulating a project of that kind, if we did not intend to find ways of rolling it out more widely.

Mr Keith Raffan (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD): How will the minister ensure that as many pupils as possible, in all local authorities, have the chance to learn a variety of languages and not just French? Does he agree that the report's recommendations must be driven forward by the Executive and not left to local authorities, if we are to reverse the fall in language course entrants to

all Scottish universities, which has already led to the closure of the languages department at the University of Abertay Dundee?

Nicol Stephen: I agree that the Scottish Executive and the education department have a role in relation to this matter, but it would be wrong to think that we alone can achieve the sort of success that Keith Raffan would like. We have to find ways of working in partnership with education authorities and schools to achieve the growth in language learning that everyone in this chamber would like to see.

We are injecting additional funding from the centre. That will be ring-fenced. Funds have risen from £3.7 million to £4.2 million this year. They will grow again to £4.7 million for each of the next two years. That is genuine additional funding. The key will be to use that money effectively to encourage greater development of modern language learning in all of our schools, in whichever part of Scotland.

Housing Stock Transfer (Repair and Improvement Grants)

7. Mr Kenneth Gibson (Glasgow) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive whether former Scottish Homes tenants in Glasgow will be eligible for the same repair and improvement grants as will be made available to all former council tenants who bought their home under the right-to-buy legislation should the proposed Glasgow housing stock transfer take place. (S10-4329)

The Deputy Minister for Social Justice (Ms Margaret Curran): Former Scottish Homes, council and housing association tenants who bought their home through the right to buy will continue to have the same eligibility to apply for improvement and repairs grants as other home owners.

Mr Gibson: Is the minister aware of the recent study by Hilland Ritchie Consultants for the Thistle Housing Association? Its report stated:

"The repair and improvement grants currently have a backlog of 3 years and the Council are not in a position to confirm when grants would be available. The grant budget has been constantly reduced, in 1995/96 there was a budget of £24m, this years budget is £6.3m."

The report also stated:

"Many of the owners would be eligible for Care and Repair Grants but ... the waiting list is about 4 years. The reality for elderly owners ... is that Care and Repair Grants are not available."

What will the minister do to reverse that disgraceful situation?

Ms Curran: From the many discussions that we have had on this issue, Kenny Gibson will know that the proposal for the Glasgow housing stock transfer will produce great investment in Glasgow.

He will know that the situation of owner-occupiers is under consideration. The Executive is looking into that in great detail and we will report very soon.

The fall in local authority expenditure on improvement and repairs grants is concerning. I am sure that Mr Gibson will support me when I say that we do not intend to ring-fence that support. I do not think that Mr Gibson supports the ring fencing of local authority expenditure—he has certainly not done so in other debates. The fall is not proportionate with the increase in expenditure that has been given to local authorities. Through the improvement task force, we are giving great consideration to the whole policy of improvement and repairs grants; it is an issue that I am sure we will continue to debate in future. I assure Mr Gibson that we will look at the matter very seriously. We are determined to improve the housing conditions of all tenants and owner-occupiers in Glasgow.

Prosecution Service

8. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West): To ask the Scottish Executive what measures are being taken to improve the prosecution service. (S10-4358)

The Solicitor General for Scotland (Mrs Elish Angiolini): The Lord Advocate and I recognise the pressure under which the Procurator Fiscal Service is working. We are committed to securing public recognition of the excellent work that is already being done and to improving the service that is being delivered.

We have a number of major initiatives under way, including an ambitious information technology strategy, the roll-out of a victim liaison service and a review that will make recommendations on the working practices and systems that are used in serious cases. The reviews of the High Court by Lord Bonyon and of summary procedure by Sheriff Principal McInnes will also provide major opportunities to secure improvement. We have instructed an internal review of the allocation of resources and of the infrastructure for the department to improve the management and support of all staff in the service.

Dennis Canavan: I congratulate the Solicitor General on her appointment and on making her first contribution to the Parliament. *[Applause.]*

Will the Solicitor General tell us what the Crown Office is doing to deal with the problem of institutional racism in the prosecution service, as revealed by Dr Raj Jandoo's inquiry into the Chhokar murder case? Why did the Crown withdraw the charge that the murder of Firsat Dag was racially motivated?

The Solicitor General for Scotland: I will deal with the second point first. Regarding the Dag trial,

the Crown prosecuted a murder that had a racial aggravation. As in many prosecutions, what is manifest at the beginning in terms of the evidence that is available to the prosecution cannot manifest itself in the evidence that is produced before the jury. In that case, the prosecutor rightly took the step of not putting the aggravation before the jury. The presiding judge recognised that that was an entirely appropriate measure to take. That does not detract from the horrifying nature of the murder or its impact on the local community. I hope that the conviction will be seen as some redress for the horrific events surrounding the case.

On Mr Canavan's first point about institutional racism, my predecessor took great strides to ensure that the complacency in relation to institutional racism that can be present in many organisations will not persist in the prosecution service in Scotland. I intend to take that work forward with some energy, to ensure that momentum is not lost. We have a draft action plan, which will be considered by the Lawrence steering group, which I will chair. I will take that major issue forward with expedience.

Paul Martin (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab): Will the Solicitor General, with the agreement of Firsat Dag's family, agree to meet the family and me to set out a full account of why those particular charges were not prosecuted further? Does the Solicitor General agree that the life sentence that was served on Scott Burrell should send a clear message that we will not accept such incidents in our society and that they will be met with a life sentence?

The Solicitor General for Scotland: I would be happy to meet the family and the member to discuss the circumstances and to provide more information if that would be helpful.

I accept that the sentence in this case sends out the clear message to those who may indulge in racially aggravated behaviour that such behaviour will be treated with the utmost seriousness by the prosecution service and that such cases will face robust prosecution in the future. I am sure that the Lord Advocate would wish me to convey that assurance to the Parliament.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton (Lothians) (Con): I, too, congratulate the Solicitor General on her new role, in which I wish her every success. Will she ensure that no cases in Scotland will be abandoned as a result of insufficiency of resources in the Procurator Fiscal Service? Will she make certain that the Procurator Fiscal Service will be properly and adequately funded?

The Solicitor General for Scotland: The Lord Advocate and I recognise the resource issue that has been identified and the pressure that the prosecution service is under. We are in touch with

ministerial colleagues on that issue. However, I do not consider that prosecutions have been abandoned on the basis of resources. I assure members that that will not be the case. Every effort will be made to ensure that there is improvement in the use of the resources and their appropriate allocation within the country.

HM Treasury (Meetings)

9. Stewart Stevenson (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive when the Minister for Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning last met Her Majesty's Treasury ministers and what issues were discussed. (S10-4341)

The Minister for Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning (Ms Wendy Alexander): I last met the chancellor at the Labour Party conference in October; we discussed a variety of matters.

Stewart Stevenson: Did the minister make her Treasury colleagues aware that 1,400 jobs are currently at risk throughout Scotland? Those jobs are mainly in rural areas and, unlike the 1,200 jobs that are regrettably being lost at NEC, are threatened wholly as a result of Government action. The chancellor's aggregates tax is likely to cost the breakwater project in my constituency up to £2 million and, interestingly enough, in Gordon Brown's constituency—

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): Order. We must have a question.

Stewart Stevenson: It is relevant, sir.

The Presiding Officer: It may be relevant, but it is not a question.

Stewart Stevenson: Is the minister aware that, in Gordon Brown's constituency, the much-welcomed Rosyth-Zeebrugge ferry project may also incur additional costs of £0.5 million? What economic assessment has been undertaken of the impact of the aggregates tax in Scotland? What representation has she made to the Treasury in London to obtain a derogation for Scotland, similar to the one that Northern Ireland has obtained, given the deleterious effects of the tax?

Ms Alexander: The Executive is in discussion with the Treasury and other parts of the UK Government about the implementation of the tax. The rules of collective responsibility preclude me from sharing any of those discussions here today. Of course, we are aware of the partial exemption for Northern Ireland.

Mr Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): The minister will be aware of the problems of community economic development companies, such as Mid Deeside Ltd in my constituency, which have problems in accessing core funding as opposed to project

funding. Does the minister have any plans to address that issue? She will be aware that I wrote to her recently on the matter.

Ms Alexander: It is important that the Parliament makes the appropriate resources available to local enterprise companies, and that those companies have the opportunity to decide priorities in their areas. A variety of local organisations contribute in important ways to economic development in their areas, but it is important that responsibility for that operates through the LEC network. It is not something that we try to second-guess in this Parliament. As Mr Rumbles is a good Liberal, I am sure that the principle of local accountability for spending decisions is one that commends itself to him.

Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP): I thank the minister for giving me notice of the closure of the individual learning accounts scheme as of this afternoon. Will the minister indicate the concerns about fraud and corruption that led to the closure of the scheme? Can she confirm whether the scheme has been closed or suspended? Will she indicate the number of companies and organisations that are affected?

Ms Alexander: I seek the Presiding Officer's guidance. A parliamentary question has been lodged on individual learning accounts, I have written to Alex Neil in his capacity as convener of the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee, and I am aware that a question has been lodged for the First Minister. I do not think that it would be appropriate for me to answer any further questions, given that the original question concerned the aggregates tax.

The Presiding Officer: Actually, the original question was not about the aggregates tax; it was as set out under question 9. If the minister discussed with the Treasury the issue to which Alex Neil referred, she is welcome to answer the question, but if she did not, she cannot.

Alex Neil: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. The issue is well within the minister's responsibilities, and it is well within the remit of the question. Given that there has not been time for a ministerial statement, the chamber is entitled to know the facts.

The Presiding Officer: If the minister does not want to answer, that is the end of the matter.

Ms Alexander: I am happy to answer on individual learning accounts if it is appropriate to do so, but the Treasury has no locus of any kind in the matter. I seek your guidance, Presiding Officer.

The Presiding Officer: In that case, we will move to question 10.

Housing Stock Transfer (Dumfries and Galloway)

10. David Mundell (South of Scotland) (Con):

To ask the Scottish Executive how transfer of Dumfries and Galloway's local authority housing stock to the Dumfries and Galloway housing partnership would benefit tenants. (S1O-4349)

The Deputy Minister for Social Justice (Ms Margaret Curran): Tenants would receive significant new investment in their homes, rent guarantees and the opportunity to become directly involved in the management of their homes and estates. The investment programme would also lead to additional job and training opportunities in the Dumfries and Galloway area.

David Mundell: The minister is aware that Dumfries and Galloway Council is the only council in Scotland that has a Labour-SNP coalition—something, no doubt, that we will see more of under proportional representation. While we might expect SNP councillors to undermine a flagship council policy on housing stock transfer, does the minister agree that it is regrettable that senior Labour councillors are consistently undermining the housing stock transfer? Does she believe that they should either get out of the administration or stay in it and argue the case for stock transfer?

Ms Curran: I am pleased to answer that question, because I have had many robust discussions with some of my friends in Dumfries and Galloway. It is no secret that there is a debate in the Labour movement about the strength of the housing stock transfer policy. I am aware that my Labour colleagues in Dumfries and Galloway are concerned, and are committed to the delivery of a housing service.

Only a few senior councillors disagree with the policy; not all members of the Labour group disagree. I have no hesitation in telling the member that those senior councillors are wrong. I am sure that we can persuade them that when they see the opportunities that the policy delivers, and see and understand that through a partnership between—

Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP): They must still be socialists.

Ms Curran: Perhaps Mr Sheridan could listen instead of shouting. It is not appropriate to always treat members in this way.

Those councillors will understand that, through the partnership with Westminster—where at last the Chancellor of the Exchequer is delivering on the housing debt—we are getting to the root causes of underinvestment in Scottish housing. The Executive is bringing its commitment to Scottish housing. We are levering in additional finance. We are getting tenants to the table. That

is the modern way to deliver housing for our people in Scotland. Labour councillors, I am sure, will ultimately be persuaded by that.

First Minister's Question Time

SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

Prime Minister (Meetings)

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

To ask the First Minister when he will next meet the Prime Minister and what issues he intends to raise. (S1F-1511)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): When I next meet the Prime Minister, I intend to raise the reliability of waiting list statistics, because he and I share a commitment to having accurate and up-to-date data available for parliamentary scrutiny. That is why, on 13 December, I said in this Parliament in reply to Mr Swinney:

"If another waiting list in Scotland is not taking referrals, we will act to deal with the fact that we did not get accurate information."—[*Official Report*, 13 December 2001; c 4864.]

I will tell the Prime Minister that, on 18 December, further information from health trusts showed that there were six waiting lists with restricted access. We wrote to instruct all trusts and boards that it was unacceptable to have any restriction placed on waiting lists for any patients. That same day, I instructed the national health service chief executive to invite Audit Scotland to conduct an independent check on how well waiting lists are being run.

The next day, the Minister for Health and Community Care issued clear instructions to NHS Scotland to guarantee that all patients who need treatment will be accepted on to a waiting list. I am pleased to say that, that same day, Audit Scotland accepted the invitation to review and scrutinise independently all the issues relating to waiting lists.

That is what I mean by openness and accountability, and that is why, on 22 November, standing where I stand today, I said that we had

"to be open and transparent in all that we do".—[*Official Report*, 22 November 2001; c 4154.]

That is what I mean by action: action to obtain the information that we need and to improve services for patients. When I next meet the Prime Minister, in 2002, I will be happy to tell him that.

Mr Swinney: We can always tell by the length of the answers how defensive the Executive feels. The only problem with the First Minister's answer is that it took him a fortnight to get round to giving it. Last week, I raised with the First Minister the case of one of my constituents. In a matter of hours, the apologists for the First Minister had gone round the press gallery to rubbish my constituent's claims. In 24 hours, the chief executive of the NHS in Tayside was on the phone

apologising unreservedly. What sort of way is that to treat members of the public? Having misled Parliament in two successive weeks, will the First Minister apologise to the Parliament for misleading it and to the public of Scotland, whom he has let down?

The First Minister: The chief executive of the NHS in Tayside was right to apologise. I hope that Mr Swinney accepted that apology for a mistake that I do not believe was made at the chief executive's level, but for which he took responsibility.

We must be clear. The issue is serious, but we must keep it in perspective. Six lists were identified this week; there may be more—if there are, Audit Scotland will identify them. Six lists from 6,000 throughout Scotland were identified. There are no closed waiting lists all over Scotland in the national health service. Scotland has more doctors, more nurses, more operations being performed, more consultants, more appointments and more, newer, hospitals. That is the reality in the health service.

When Mr Swinney runs his campaign all over Scotland saying that everything is bad in the health service and that patients are all getting a raw deal, he is the one who misleads Scotland. What he says is untrue. It is an insult to the hard work of doctors and nurses, porters, ancillary staff and ambulance paramedics right across Scotland who will be working next week when we are at home not working.

Mr Swinney: The difference between the First Minister and me on this issue is that I told the truth throughout the whole process.

Last week, the First Minister said that there were no closed waiting lists all over Scotland. Today, he has admitted that there are six closed waiting lists: they are in Lothian, Lanarkshire, Lomond and Argyll, Renfrew and Inverclyde, Tayside and north Glasgow. According to information that patients have given to my office, that is also the case in the Lothian University Hospitals NHS Trust, in Aberdeenshire and in other places.

I want to probe the First Minister on his personal assurances to the Parliament. He has just repeated something that he said to me a fortnight ago. He told me that the number of operations, patients and consultations is up. Is that true?

The First Minister: Yes, it is. The truth about the situation in relation to the case in the Lothians has already been the subject of a reply from Mr Chisholm. I am glad that Mr Swinney took the advice that I gave him last week to ensure that he got a reply in advance of today's question time. I am also pleased to see that, exactly as I expected, he has ignored the reply.

There are not closed waiting lists all over Scotland. Mr Swinney is wrong to imply that that is the case. Of the 6,000 waiting lists in Scotland, six examples have been identified. It is wrong for Mr Swinney to frighten patients and others in this way. It is an insult to the hard work of those in hospitals and in other places across Scotland who are working hard to serve our patients and to bring down waiting lists. The challenge that is in front of us and the challenge that we will continue to follow is to put patients, rather than political posturing, first.

Mr Swinney: It is also wrong of the First Minister to keep on misleading the public. There are closed waiting lists around the country. I have a different list today and I will pass it to the Minister for Health and Community Care this afternoon. Last week, our claims were rubbished and yet they have been backed up by the information that we have put to Parliament.

I asked the First Minister a direct question. I asked whether the number of operations, patients and consultations was up. Is it true? There was no answer to that question. [MEMBERS: "He was saying 'Yes'."] Oh, was he?

The reason is that hospitals are seeing 8,000 fewer day patients; 5,000 fewer in-patients; and 78,000 fewer out-patients—over 100,000 fewer people are being treated in Scotland's hospitals. Those are the facts. Whose facts are they? They are the Government's statistics, from its own website. How on earth can we hope to improve waiting times in our hospitals if we are treating fewer patients? How can we address the problems of the health service if the First Minister will not tell the truth about them?

The First Minister: That is absolutely not the case. There are 58,000 more in-patient treatments; 31,516 more accident and emergency patients; 100,000 more general practitioner consultations; 1,300 more student nurses; 269 more hospital doctors; 215 more consultants; and a massive £1.1 billion more going into the national health service in Scotland. Those are the facts. Mr Swinney should tell the truth and he should stop his campaign of trying to mislead the public by suggesting that there are closed waiting lists all over Scotland.

Cabinet (Meetings)

2. David McLetchie (Lothians) (Con): To ask the First Minister when the Scottish Executive's Cabinet will next meet and what issues will be discussed. (S1F-1512)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): Following a decision to change the day of the meeting, the Cabinet will next meet on Wednesday 9 January at 9.30 am, when it will

discuss improving public services in urban and rural Scotland.

David McLetchie: I am delighted to hear that the improvement of public services is high on the agenda and, in particular, the health service, which has been discussed in today's question time.

As the First Minister will be aware, down south the National Audit Office report uncovered evidence of systematic fiddling of waiting list figures to meet Government targets in every hospital that it investigated. It found that appointments were timed deliberately to clash with holidays, which meant that when appointments were cancelled, the patient disappeared from the main waiting list. Is that going on in Scotland? Can I have the First Minister's guarantee that the Audit Scotland investigation to which he referred will cover those areas and look into those issues?

The First Minister: I am grateful to Mr McLetchie for his serious question, which demands a serious response. The Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Health made it clear yesterday that the information that was published by the National Audit Office yesterday was shocking. I hope that it will result in action throughout the service to stop the situation happening again.

That is precisely why I wanted to ensure that the Auditor General in Scotland would conduct an investigation. It is right and proper for that to happen independently of the Scottish Executive or its health department. I hope that any investigation will have conclusions that will justify to everybody in the Parliament exactly what is going on. However, if there is anything wrong in relation to the publication of waiting list statistics, or if there is movement of people around waiting lists for purposes that should not exist in our health service in Scotland, I can assure the member that we will take action to stop it.

David McLetchie: I thank the First Minister for his assurance.

In the spirit of openness, honesty and truthfulness, I ask the First Minister to reconsider something that he said at question time last week in response to a question from me. He said that the Conservative Government

"did not build any hospitals".—[*Official Report*, 13 December 2001; c 4866.]

Well, I have a little list: Raigmore hospital in Inverness; Queen Margaret hospital in Dunfermline; Royal Alexandra hospital in Paisley; Borders general hospital in Melrose; Ferguson day hospital in Prestwick; Ayr hospital; Lorn and Islands district general hospital in Oban; St Johns hospital in Livingston; and Lochmaben hospital in

Dumfries and Galloway. They were only part of more than 100 major NHS developments in Scotland from 1979 to 1997. On top of that, seven of the eight major hospital developments that are part of Labour's NHS building programme were initiated and approved under the Conservatives, for example Edinburgh royal infirmary, Wishaw general hospital, Hairmyres hospital and East Ayrshire community hospital. I think we are getting the point.

The First Minister claims that he wants to put an end to political point scoring and to have a serious debate about issues affecting the NHS in Scotland. He seems happy, when it suits him for the purposes of these exchanges, to adopt a kind of Pol Pot year zero approach to the health service in Scotland. In the light of all that information, and in the spirit of openness, truthfulness and honesty, will the First Minister acknowledge that what he said last week was inaccurate and set the record straight?

The First Minister: I would strenuously deny any similarities between myself and Pol Pot. I recognise that Mr McLetchie can be sensitive about such matters, but it is important to recognise that the picture in the health service has been considerably different since 1997. The figures that I outlined earlier to Mr Swinney—who clearly has some difficulty in listening to such matters—were the differences in the number of patients, doctors and nurses in our health service since 1997. That has been a substantial change, which has benefited patients directly.

Although the Conservatives like to claim the credit for seven hospital projects that were at least on the starting grid before 1997, they should remember that the former Chancellor of the Exchequer, Ken Clarke, said after the election that there was no way that the Tories could have implemented their spending plans in the way that they were laid out. It is important to recognise that. The Conservatives had no intention of building those hospitals. We did, and we are very proud to say that we have.

Rural Economy

3. Richard Lochhead (North-East Scotland) (SNP): To ask the First Minister what progress the Scottish Executive is making in improving the rural economy. (S1F-1507)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): The rural economy sits within the economy of Scotland and the United Kingdom, and the underlying fundamentals are relatively strong, thanks to the good stewardship of the UK chancellor. We are committed to building a prosperous and vibrant rural economy. Some of the evidence shows that it is improving, with, for example, higher employment than in our urban communities.

However—members may not want to pay attention to this point, but it is important for people who live in rural areas—average earnings are still lower than earnings elsewhere in Scotland. Our rural communities have faced additional problems this year. As a result, we have taken action to invest in transport, tourism and the foot-and-mouth recovery package.

Richard Lochhead: Is the First Minister aware that there are hundreds of thousands of ordinary people in our rural communities who had hoped for more from the Government over the past two and a half years? In many areas of Scotland, affordable housing, tourism and affordable public transport are in decline. Will he be brave enough to publish a report early in the new year, detailing the impact that his policies have had on rural Scotland over the past two and a half years? Does he accept that it is not this Parliament that is letting down our rural communities, but the Westminster Labour Government and the Labour-Liberal coalition that runs the Government here in Edinburgh?

The First Minister: I do not accept that. If I am to be consistent, I must say clearly that what we do not need in rural Scotland is more reports. We need action on tourism, action on farming and action on fishing. Regarding action on fishing, I seem to remember, only a fortnight ago in this chamber, that Mr Lochhead said that the UK would somehow let Scotland down on fishing. Well, I would like to congratulate not just Ross Finnie, but Elliot Morley on representing Scotland's fishermen in Brussels on Monday and getting improvements on at least three different quotas. If Mr Lochhead had any dignity, he would apologise to the chamber today.

Alex Fergusson (South of Scotland) (Con): Does the First Minister agree that the attempt by the Scottish Executive, through Scottish Enterprise Dumfries and Galloway, to reinvigorate and improve the rural economy of that region post-foot-and-mouth, by giving businesses access to interest-free loans of £5,000, displayed absolutely none of the flexibility and innovation for which members from all sides of the chamber asked? Given the continued parlous state of the economy of that region, will the First Minister ask the Minister for Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning to explore fully the possibility of turning those loans into grants, so that true economic improvement can take place in the region?

The First Minister: There is, of course, a difference between a loan and a grant, as I am sure Mr Fergusson is only too well aware. It would be wrong of me, on the hoof, to commit to budget expenditure in that way. It is important that we have a recovery package, but it is also important that that recovery package works successfully. If

there is evidence—in Dumfries and Galloway or anywhere else—that systems are breaking down and that the delivery of support and services is being affected as a result, we would definitely want to examine that evidence. I give a commitment to do that.

Rhona Brankin (Midlothian) (Lab): Does the First Minister agree that putting an additional £150 million into agricultural subsidies, £30 million into the rural transport fund, £30 million into foot-and-mouth recovery and £25 million into a decommissioning scheme for the fishing industry represents a strong commitment to the rural economy by the Executive?

The First Minister: I do not think that there is anybody who has been genuinely listening to the debates in this chamber over the past two and a half years who would say that this Parliament has not taken rural affairs in Scotland seriously. It is true that, this year, the total income from farming in Scotland is up; that the total expenditure by the Executive to support tourism is up; and that the support given by the Executive to rural housing in Scotland is up. This year, the money that is given to rural transport projects, of which there are now around 380 in Scotland, is also up. In all those areas and many others, there has been a commitment in the Executive and in the Parliament to rural Scotland, which matches the commitment to urban Scotland. We should see Scotland as a whole, we should work for both urban and rural Scotland and we should be proud to do so.

Homelessness (Families)

4. Scott Barrie (Dunfermline West) (Lab): To ask the First Minister what action is being taken to tackle homelessness among families. (S1F-1518)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 gave new rights to homeless people. For the sake of families with children in particular, we have acted to reduce reliance on bed and breakfast accommodation. We allocated £5.3 million to the 15 local authorities that had the highest use of bed-and-breakfasts, to fund new alternatives. That money provided 200 units of temporary accommodation, and another 64 are planned.

More generally, £27 million has been given to councils to help implement the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001. That money will also fund new and better temporary accommodation.

Scott Barrie: I welcome the reduction in the number of families who are living in temporary accommodation, but does the First Minister agree that it is grossly unsuitable for children to be brought up in such accommodation? Will he assure me that the Executive will continue to work

to reduce the number of children living in such households?

The First Minister: Yes, I can give the member that assurance. This is a traditional time of year for addressing issues around homelessness, not just for children and families who face the prospect of spending Christmas or new year in bed-and-breakfast or temporary accommodation, but for many other people across Scotland who have to live with temporary homelessness or the threat of it. Our thoughts should be with them this Christmas and our support for them should continue in the new year.

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): We have run over time. Our next item of business is—

Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Given the importance of the closure of the individual learning accounts, will you under standing orders exercise your discretion to extend First Minister's question time by enough time to reach question 6? It is critical that the chamber receives the proper information on the closure of the accounts, because its cash effect could be very damaging to colleges and others over the holiday period.

Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con): On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

The Presiding Officer: Is it the same point of order?

Phil Gallie: Yes. I already intended to raise the point of order. One of the companies to which the question refers contacted me immediately before question time to tell me that, because of lack of funding, it has been obliged to lay off training staff just before Christmas. As a result, I feel that it would be useful to proceed with the question.

The Presiding Officer: It may be useful, but unhappily the business motion that the Parliament agreed to stipulates that, at 3.30 pm, we move to the next item of business. I have no power to vary that.

The First Minister: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I want to clarify something to the chamber. We were aware that the chamber was rising this afternoon for the Christmas and new year recess. The announcement of the decision to suspend ILAs and of some of the technicalities around the suspension of ILAs in Scotland was due to take place tomorrow in conjunction with another announcement elsewhere in the UK. We brought the announcement forward to today and ensured that it took place before this question time session to give us a chance to address the matter if we reached question 6. The Minister for Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning has written today to every MSP to set out the current position clearly and she will be happy to take

further correspondence and questions from members before the chamber returns if necessary. I hope that that clears up the matter this afternoon.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you very much.

Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

The Presiding Officer: Just a second. I want to return to the main point of order. The Parliament itself decides on the order and timing of business and I have no power to vary that. Sometimes we manage to reach question 6; very often we do not. The length and number of supplementaries is entirely in the hands of members. I do my best to keep things going.

Fiona Hyslop: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Is it possible to lodge a motion without notice to change the business bulletin in order to put back the next item of business so that we can extend First Minister's question time and hear the answer to question 6?

The Presiding Officer: That would require to be a Parliamentary Bureau motion. [*Interruption.*] Order. We have listened to the exchanges on this matter. The First Minister has given us a helpful answer and we should leave it at that.

Alex Neil: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I have been informed by the former Minister for Parliament that you have already set a precedent of extending question time at your own discretion. Given that you have already set that precedent and that the clear will of the chamber is that we should have the chance to ask the First Minister questions on the matter, I really think that you are duty-bound to give the proposal more serious consideration.

The Presiding Officer: The member is quite correct. I occasionally turn a blind eye to the clock and allow question time to go on. However, I have no power to go from question 4 to question 6. Members must be reasonable. Frankly, the matter is in members' hands. We did not make much progress today either in question time or in First Minister's question time. The issue is all to do with the length of supplementaries and answers.

Michael Russell (South of Scotland) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. If Nora Radcliffe were to withdraw question 5—which she might be persuaded to do—we would be able to take question 6.

The Presiding Officer: I have already ruled on this matter.

Phil Gallie: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. It was said that the business managers would have to come forward with a further business motion to change the time for decision time. Perhaps, given this delay and the fact that

we will almost certainly bring forward decision time, the business managers could ask for the concession that members so clearly want.

The Presiding Officer: That is not a matter for me. I have no motion before me.

Ms Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I seek clarification. Is it in order for a member to move a motion without notice after question time has concluded? As we know that the work has been done, the First Minister could lodge a motion to the effect that the Parliament notes it. Could that be done?

The Presiding Officer: I have answered that question already. The motion would have to be a Parliamentary Bureau motion and I have no such motion before me. A motion cannot just come out of the blue.

Ms MacDonald: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I seek further clarification. Can only a bureau motion be accepted?

The Presiding Officer: No. However, to change the order of business requires a bureau motion.

Alex Neil: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Would it be in order for me to move a motion that we do not conclude business at 3.40 pm, as has been agreed, but that we continue until well after 4 o'clock, if necessary, to give us the opportunity to find out what is going on with the ILAs?

The Presiding Officer: We would still need a bureau motion to do that and I have not got one. We must proceed to the next item.

Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body

15:36

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): The next item is the election of a member to the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body. The announcement in today's business bulletin explains the procedure that will be followed. I have received one valid nomination for appointment as a member of the corporate body—Duncan McNeil—but that is subject to a vote of the Parliament. A quarter of members present must vote for that appointment.

The question is, that Duncan McNeil be elected as a member of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body.

Members voted.

FOR

Adam, Brian (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
Davidson, Mr David (North-East Scotland) (Con)
Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
Elder, Dorothy-Grace (Glasgow) (SNP)
Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (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)
Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
Gray, Iain (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Lab)
Hamilton, Mr Duncan (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (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)
 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)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McIntosh, Mrs Lyndsay (Central Scotland) (Con)
 McLeod, Fiona (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McLetchie, David (Lothians) (Con)
 McMahon, Mr Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP)
 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)
 Paterson, Mr Gil (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Raffan, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Reid, Mr George (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mr Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Ochil) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North-East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Mrs Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Tosh, Mr Murray (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)
 Young, John (West of Scotland) (Con)

ABSTENTIONS

Campbell, Colin (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Gibson, Mr Kenneth (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 Quinan, Mr Lloyd (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)

SPOILED VOTES

Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The results of the vote are as follows: For 91, Against 0, Abstentions 7, Spoiled Votes 1. I declare that Duncan McNeil is elected as a member of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body.

Motion without Notice

15:42

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): On the subject of Alex Neil's point of order, I have been advised that, if someone moved a motion without notice that we take note of the closure of the lifelong learning accounts, it would be up to the Parliament to decide whether to agree to that motion.

I remind members that, just before 4 o'clock, the President of Croatia will address a meeting in committee room 1, to which everyone is welcome.

Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP): I would like to move a motion without notice that we hear from the First Minister this afternoon on the subject of the closure of the individual learning accounts.

I move,

That a motion on Individual Learning Accounts be taken at this meeting of the Parliament.

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I remind members that, at the invitation of the Scottish Parliament—not the Executive—the President of Croatia is in the Parliament today and is due to address us in seven minutes' time. The members who pretend occasionally that they want Scotland to be an independent and dignified country might not regard it as discourteous for us to take the action that Alex Neil has suggested, but I do. Ms Alexander has written to every member of the Scottish Parliament today and I have already said—

Alex Neil: On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

The First Minister: I am in the middle of a point of order.

Alex Neil: The First Minister is not making a point of order.

The Presiding Officer: Order. The First Minister is in the middle of a point of order and I can take only one at a time.

The First Minister: Ms Alexander has written to every member of the Scottish Parliament and I have made it clear that she will answer any questions that members have on this matter during the recess. I repeat that I think that it would be discourteous for the chamber to keep the President of Croatia waiting when he has come to see us.

The Presiding Officer: I will put the question on the motion without notice. The question is, that a motion on individual learning accounts be taken at this meeting of the Parliament. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, Brian (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Campbell, Colin (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Davidson, Mr David (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Elder, Dorothy-Grace (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Fergusson, Alex (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gibson, Mr Kenneth (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Hamilton, Mr Duncan (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 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)
 McAllion, Mr John (Dundee East) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McGugan, Irene (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 McIntosh, Mrs Lyndsay (Central Scotland) (Con)
 McLeod, Fiona (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McLetchie, David (Lothians) (Con)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP)
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Mr Gil (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Quinan, Mr Lloyd (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Reid, Mr George (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Ullrich, Kay (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

AGAINST

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (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)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Fitzpatrick, Brian (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)

Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Jenkins, Iain (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 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)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 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)
 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)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Ochil) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North-East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Mrs Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Thomson, Elaine (Aberdeen North) (Lab)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

ABSTENTIONS

Tosh, Mr Murray (South of Scotland) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 52, Against 54, Abstentions 1.

Motion disagreed to.

Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP): On a point of order—

The Presiding Officer: I hope that members will listen to what the First Minister just said. I am due to take the chair for the address from the President of Croatia. Tommy Sheridan has a point of order.

Tommy Sheridan: Will you inform us fully of the situation? I understood that we had voted to bring forward decision time.

The Presiding Officer: Not yet.

Tommy Sheridan: That is why my question is key. If the reason that we are not to have a statement on individual learning accounts is the

invitation for the President of Croatia to address a meeting at 4 o'clock, that is a wee bit precipitate, given that we have not even voted to bring forward decision time.

The Presiding Officer: The chamber has decided not to take the motion without notice on a statement on individual learning accounts. I did not decide that. We cannot redebate the issue.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

15:45

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): I call Euan Robson to move motions S1M-2560 and S1M-2569, in the name of Patricia Ferguson, on the designation of lead committees and membership of committees.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Education, Culture and Sport Committee be designated as lead committee in consideration of the Education (Disability Strategies and Pupils' Records) (Scotland) Bill and that the Equal Opportunities Committee and the Local Government Committee be secondary committees

That the Parliament agrees that the following Members be appointed to Committees—

Duncan Hamilton to replace Margaret Ewing on the Justice 2 Committee; and Andrew Wilson to replace Duncan Hamilton on the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee.—[*Euan Robson.*]

Motion without Notice

15:46

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): I am minded to accept a motion without notice from Euan Robson that we bring forward decision time.

Motion moved,

That S1M-2573 be taken at this meeting of the Parliament.—[*Euan Robson.*]

The Presiding Officer: The question is, that the motion be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 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)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Fitzpatrick, Brian (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (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)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (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)

McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (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, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Ochil) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Mrs Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Thomson, Elaine (Aberdeen North) (Lab)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

AGAINST

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, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 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)
 McLeod, Fiona (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Mr Gil (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Quinan, Mr Lloyd (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Reid, Mr George (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Ullrich, Kay (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Young, John (West of Scotland) (Con)

ABSTENTIONS

Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Tosh, Mr Murray (South of Scotland) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division—[*Interruption.*] Order. Members must

listen to the result. The result of the division is: For 74, Against 35, Abstentions 2.

Motion agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: I ask Mr Robson to move the motion.

The Deputy Minister for Parliamentary Business (Euan Robson): I formally move the motion.

The Presiding Officer: Which is what? *[Laughter.]*

Euan Robson: I am afraid that I cannot hear you.

The Presiding Officer: The motion is to bring forward decision time.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees under Rule 11.2.4 of the Standing Orders that Decision Time on Thursday 20 December be taken at 3.48 pm.—*[Euan Robson.]*

The Presiding Officer: If the motion is—*[Interruption.]* Order. Members are entering the Christmas spirit a little too early. If the motion is not agreed to, I will have to suspend the meeting until 5 pm. The question is, that decision time be brought forward and begin now. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (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)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Fitzpatrick, Brian (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (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)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McIntosh, Mrs Lyndsay (Central Scotland) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Lothians) (Con)
 McMahan, Mr Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (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, Iain (North-East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Mrs Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Thomson, Elaine (Aberdeen North) (Lab)
 Tosh, Mr Murray (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)
 Young, John (West of Scotland) (Con)

AGAINST

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, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 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)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McGugan, Irene (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (West of Scotland) (SNP)

Morgan, Alasdair (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Mr Gil (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Quinan, Mr Lloyd (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Reid, Mr George (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Ullrich, Kay (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

ABSTENTIONS

Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 79, Against 33, Abstentions 1.

Motion agreed to.

Decision Time

15:50

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): There are five questions to be put as a result of today's business.

The first question is, that amendment S1M-2524.1, in the name of Tommy Sheridan, which seeks to amend motion S1M-2524, in the name of Mr Andy Kerr, on the Scottish Local Government (Elections) Bill, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)
 Davidson, Mr David (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Elder, Dorothy-Grace (Glasgow) (SNP)
 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)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Johnstone, Alex (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McIntosh, Mrs Lyndsay (Central Scotland) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Lothians) (Con)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Tosh, Mr Murray (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Young, John (West of Scotland) (Con)

AGAINST

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Fitzpatrick, Brian (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (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)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (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)
 McMahon, Mr Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 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)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Ochil) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North-East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Mrs Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Thomson, Elaine (Aberdeen North) (Lab)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

ABSTENTIONS

Adam, Brian (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 Campbell, Colin (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (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)
 MacKay, Angus (Edinburgh South) (Lab)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McGugan, Irene (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Mr Gil (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Quinan, Mr Lloyd (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Reid, Mr George (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Ullrich, Kay (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 21, Against 64, Abstentions 30.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The second question is, that motion S1M-2524, in the name of Mr Andy Kerr, on the Scottish Local Government (Elections) Bill, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Fitzpatrick, Brian (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (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)
 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)
 McMahon, Mr Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 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)

Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Ochil) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North-East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Mrs Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Thomson, Elaine (Aberdeen North) (Lab)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

AGAINST

Adam, Brian (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Campbell, Colin (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Davidson, Mr David (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Elder, Dorothy-Grace (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Fergusson, Alex (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gibson, Mr Kenneth (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Hamilton, Mr Duncan (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Lochhead, Richard (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Ms Margo (Lothians) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McGugan, Irene (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 McIntosh, Mrs Lyndsay (Central Scotland) (Con)
 McLeod, Fiona (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McLetchie, David (Lothians) (Con)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP)
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Mr Gil (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Quinan, Mr Lloyd (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Tosh, Mr Murray (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Ullrich, Kay (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Young, John (West of Scotland) (Con)

ABSTENTIONS

Reid, Mr George (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 64, Against 50, Abstentions 1.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees that the Scottish Local Government (Elections) Bill be passed.

The Presiding Officer: The third question is, that motion S1M-2507, in the name of Cathy Jamieson, on the School Education (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees that the School Education (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill be passed.

The Presiding Officer: The fourth question is, that motion S1M-2560, in the name of Patricia Ferguson, on designation of lead committees, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees that the Education, Culture and Sport Committee be designated as lead committee in consideration of the Education (Disability Strategies and Pupils' Records) (Scotland) Bill and that the Equal Opportunities Committee and the Local Government Committee be secondary committees.

The Presiding Officer: The fifth question is, that motion S1M-2569, in the name of Patricia Ferguson, on membership of committees, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees that the following Members be appointed to Committees—

Duncan Hamilton to replace Margaret Ewing on the Justice 2 Committee; and Andrew Wilson to replace Duncan Hamilton on the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee.

The Presiding Officer: I have one more announcement to make to the chamber before we move to members' business. The Commonwealth Speakers and Presiding Officers Conference, which meets every two years, is meeting next on 9 to 12 January and I trust that the chamber will grant me leave of absence to attend.

Finally, I wish members a very happy Christmas.

New Lanark

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): We now come to the final item of business, which is a members' business debate on motion S1M-2529, in the name of Karen Gillon, on New Lanark.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament recognises the significant contribution that New Lanark has made to the social, cultural and educational fabric of Scotland; congratulates the New Lanark Conservation Trust on the excellent work that it has done in restoring the village to its natural beauty, and congratulates UNESCO on granting the village full World Heritage Status.

15:54

Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab): I am proud to represent Clydesdale, which is one of the most beautiful and diverse parts of Scotland and which has a wealth of history, culture and experience. In many ways, it is a microcosm of Scotland, both urban and rural, and New Lanark is the jewel in its crown. That is why I am delighted that my first members' business debate is on New Lanark. I am grateful to the members from all parties who have signed the motion and to those who have stayed behind tonight—of all nights—for the debate.

I welcome to the public gallery representatives of the trustees and staff of the New Lanark Conservation Trust, many of whom have worked on the project for more than 20 years. They were tremendously proud when, last Friday, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization rightly granted the village world heritage status. In particular, I pay tribute to the work of Harry Smith, the chairman of trustees, and Jim Arnold, the director, who have been with the project since its inception and who had the vision and belief to see it through to its wonderful conclusion.

World heritage sites are diverse and include some of the most beautiful and historically significant sites in the world—the pyramids, the Taj Mahal and the great wall of China, to name but a few. New Lanark is special and unique and deserves to be added to that illustrious list.

New Lanark was born out of a spirit of enterprise allied to a vision of a better, fairer future for all. Robert Owen was a man of vision; he was way before his time. In Owen, enterprise was allied to a passionate belief that the key factor to a better and fairer society was education. In an age characterised by cruel mill managers and “dark satanic mills” Owen recognised that the most important assets of the company were its work force and their families. He introduced decent homes, fair wages, free health care and co-

operative shops. He took children out of the cotton mills and put them into the classroom.

The first infant school in the world was established in the village. Evening classes were provided for the adults too. The work force had access to the arts, music, nature study, history and geography, as well as the traditional reading, writing and arithmetic, which gave the most comprehensive of educations. Owen's work had a significant impact not just in New Lanark, but throughout the world. It inspired progressive education, factory reform, humane working practices, co-operation and garden cities.

The New Lanark cotton mills continued in production until 1968. The closure of the mills created a crisis and the village came close to at least partial demolition. In 1974, the New Lanark Conservation Trust was formed. It was committed to the restoration of New Lanark as a living, working community and an excellent example of an industrial settlement. Today, that dream has been realised. The housing has been restored and the village has a resident population of 180, who live in beautiful sandstone tenements.

The mill buildings, school and the Institute for the Formation of Character building are all now back to their former glory. New Lanark is a successful tourist attraction with an award winning visitor centre and an excellent hotel. It welcomes about 400,000 visitors every year from all over the world, including the Scottish Parliament Education, Culture and Sport Committee in September. I am sure that anyone who has made the journey to New Lanark could not help but be impressed, not just by the stunning natural beauty of the Falls of Clyde and the village nestling below, but by the truly world-class facilities that are on offer.

The granting of world heritage status to the village is not before time. In it, New Lanark gains universal cultural acclamation and access to an international network of sites. I know that our late First Minister, Donald Dewar, was passionately committed to New Lanark and a regular visitor to the village. He would be proud at the recognition that it has now been given. New Lanark is a worthy addition to the world heritage list. It is the first such industrial site in Scotland, and it will represent Scotland well.

Scotland's heritage is diverse. It may include castles and stately homes, but our social and industrial heritage is just as important. It shapes who we are. It is right that the social and industrial heritage that is so much part of our traditions is recognised alongside the more traditional visions of heritage. That is what New Lanark encompasses.

What are the challenges and opportunities for New Lanark—and indeed for the Parliament—

now? Clydesdale has an opportunity to build on New Lanark's success and to secure further economic and social regeneration. We must further develop our infrastructure and the tourism industry to ensure that the 400,000 people who visit New Lanark explore the other hidden treasures that can be found throughout Clydesdale. We must sustain the positive partnership that exists between the local councils, the Scottish Executive and other bodies so as to develop the village further.

Developments such as that at New Lanark will cost money, and it will continue to cost money to sustain the village and further develop its successes. We must work together to ensure that the money is in place.

The Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport and the Parliament have an opportunity to think outside the box. Why are educational visits to national museums and galleries and to Historic Scotland sites free, yet schools must pay to take children to New Lanark, which is a vital part of our social culture and heritage? Given New Lanark's unique position as Scotland's only industrial world heritage site, will the minister consider making provision for free educational visits to New Lanark as a positive investment by the Scottish Executive in future generations' educational development?

New Lanark is not just about the past—about history and heritage: it is a vision of socialist planning and co-operation that is as relevant today as it was in the 1800s. In the words of Robert Owen on new year's day 1816:

"What ideas individuals may attach to the term 'millennium' I know not; but I know that society may be formed so as to exist without crime, without poverty, with health greatly improved, with little, if any misery, and with intelligence and happiness increased a hundredfold; and no obstacle whatsoever intervenes at this moment except ignorance to prevent such a state of society from becoming universal".

Those words are as relevant today as they were when they were spoken. They articulate a vision of society that I share and to which all of us must aspire. That vision can be achieved with unity of purpose, commitment and hard work—the same unity of purpose, commitment and hard work that have secured world heritage status for New Lanark.

16:01

Michael Russell (South of Scotland) (SNP): Forgive me as I croak my way through this speech—my voice has almost gone.

I congratulate Karen Gillon on securing this debate and those involved with New Lanark on securing world heritage status for the village. I started to visit New Lanark when I lived in

Clydesdale, in the 1980s. I have seen the village develop so much since then that I feel that I know it very well. I am particularly fond of New Lanark not least because, in the 1987 general election, when I was the SNP candidate in Clydesdale, we won the village of New Lanark—we did not win many villages in that election. I hope that New Lanark has remained faithful to all sorts of causes, including that of the SNP.

This is an achievement of world significance—and we should always welcome world-class performance by people in Scotland. Jim Arnold and Harry Smith deserve world recognition for the passion and vision that they have shown and for the fact that they have not given up. There must have been many times when, in the face of enormous difficulties and obstacles, they felt like doing so. However, they went on and recreated something of great significance.

I want to share with members the story of one day that I spent in New Lanark, as I have come to think of it as a rather special day. Karen Gillon said that, this September, the Education, Culture and Sport Committee visited New Lanark. We did. We were there on 11 September. That afternoon, we undertook a tour of New Lanark with Jim Arnold and Harry Smith. It was not the first time that I had been round the village, but it was a fascinating afternoon.

In New Lanark, mobile phone reception is not very good, but we were standing outside the hotel when Cathy Peattie's mobile phone went off and her daughter told her that something extraordinary had happened in New York. After hearing the basic details from Cathy, we went inside, spoke to a number of people and went upstairs to our rooms, where we watched television for 20 or 30 minutes. I then drove to Edinburgh, where I had to attend a meeting, listening to the radio all the way. After the meeting I returned to New Lanark.

When I think about that day now, I recognise that it was a day of huge contrasts. It was a day when we saw the worst that human beings can do one to another and a place that epitomises the best that human beings can do one to another. In New Lanark there is a vision of human beings helping one another and interacting with kindness—that is a good word—and generosity. As Jim Arnold knows, in New Lanark a number of Gaelic speakers evicted from the Highlands were able to find employment and—in the real and best sense of the word—betterment of their condition.

In my mind, 11 September, a day on which we will all remember where we were, is intertwined with a vision of a better society—a vision of a better Scotland and how that can be achieved. I shall go back to New Lanark again and again—not just because of that recognition, but because I love the place. Now, however, every visit will have

a deeper meaning for me. I suspect that that is true for many members of the Education, Culture and Sport Committee.

I commend the motion to the chamber and commend those who are working in New Lanark. If people have not been there, they should go there now.

16:05

Mrs Lyndsay McIntosh (Central Scotland) (Con): I congratulate Karen Gillon on her motion. I also congratulate the New Lanark Conservation Trust. It gives me great pleasure to see the work that has been done in New Lanark village, which was undoubtedly vital to UNESCO's decision.

New Lanark village works on a number of levels. It contributes towards the social, cultural and educational fabric of Scotland. The village, which was founded in 1785 as a new industrial settlement by David Dale, first came to prominence under Robert Owen, who created imposing mill buildings and spacious and well-designed houses for his workers. The cotton mills remained in production until after 1968, after which a massive programme of restoration and conservation was carried out by the trust, which is an independent charity that was founded in 1974.

The village is Scotland's largest visitor attraction in terms of acreage and plays host to 400,000 visitors a year. On an educational level, the village offers group visits for schoolchildren—I was one such child—providing them with an opportunity to see for themselves the living conditions of the early 19th century. One can visit the mill house, Robert Owen's house and the village store. I am particularly interested in some of the new businesses that have been set up. I recall once purchasing the most beautiful hand-knitted garment. If I were now as I was then, I would have modelled it today but, unfortunately, it no longer fits me. Schoolchildren and visitors can be educated on a range of subjects as diverse as marketing to industrial archaeology.

Since 1972, UNESCO has compiled an annual list of the most precious cultural places on earth. Its thinking is that we all share a common heritage and that the international community should bear the responsibility for protecting those sites. New Lanark was added to UNESCO's world heritage site list in 2001. A relative of mine worked for UNESCO, so I was interested in the UNESCO perspective even before then.

Thirty-one new sites have been added to the list of 721 sites of outstanding universal value in 124 countries from Austria to Uzbekistan. Of those 721, 24 are in the UK. Alongside the village of New Lanark are the Derwent valley mills and the Dorset and East Devon coast.

I welcome the opportunity to congratulate those who have worked so hard on making New Lanark village the success that it is today. The UNESCO award is well deserved and I am sure that it will serve to add continuing success to New Lanark village.

16:08

Brian Fitzpatrick (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab): Karen Gillon, who is the constituency member for New Lanark, is to be congratulated on securing this debate and on an excellent speech.

I am particularly pleased that this debate, on New Lanark—rather than this afternoon's previous business—is our last debate in 2001. The advent of democratic Parliaments such as the Scottish Parliament, is not a chance event. They spring from democratic movements and from winning the battle of ideas.

Change for the better in Scotland—just as in the rest of Britain—never happened simply by chance. Change for the better has always been based on choices made by working families. As our country aspires to, and reaches, new heights of prosperity, progress and peace—as always, the lion's share of credit for that goes to the working people, who do the work, raise the kids and dream the dreams—let us remember that we cannot take our future for granted. Let us also remember how we got here.

When we listen to the calls for change and work to make them real, we can hear the echoes back through time and through places—and particularly through places such as New Lanark. When we come to write the history of the origins of the Scottish Parliament, I trust that we will accord a proper place to the historical significance of the New Lanark site for the Labour movement in Scotland and throughout the globe. As Mike Russell said, New Lanark reminds us of the bonds of solidarity and of the respect for the rights and the dignity of humankind—particularly those of working people and their families—that is to be found at the core of all progressive movements. It is in solidarity that we all move forward.

We know that we still have a road to travel, but we should not forget the distance that we have come. Before today's debate, I read Robert Owen's evidence to the committee that Peel established to look at factory conditions. Owen was a dangerous man. He was dangerous enough to suggest that factory work should perhaps be restricted to children over the age of 10. He suggested that youngsters between 10 and 18 should not be forced to work more than 10 hours a day.

At that House of Commons committee, Owen was asked:

"If you do not employ children under 10, what would you do with them?"

He answered:

"Instruct them, and give them exercise".

His interlocutor continued:

"Would not there be a danger of their acquiring, by that time, vicious habits, for want of regular occupation?"

Undaunted, Owen replied:

"My own experience leads me to say, that I found quite the reverse, that their habits have been good in proportion to the extent of their instruction."

The buildings at the New Lanark site stand as silent but active witnesses to the work and insistent demands of our forebears, who demanded that the many should have democratic control over their own destinies. Our forebears rejected the notion that workers and their families are simply components for the better use of production lines.

Karen Gillon has shown how New Lanark stands as an eloquent tribute to solidarity. Although it can be invidious to mention the contributions of individuals when we are talking about movements, I commend the individuals whom Karen commended and want to mention three others. Claudine Rozenberg from Bearsden, which is in my constituency, has made a significant contribution to the international links that are a necessary part of the work of New Lanark today. Those links are reminders of the wider context of the New Lanark site, not least because they recognise the connections with the visionary ingenuity of the architect, Claude-Nicolas Ledoux, and the Royal Saltworks at Chaux, which also constitute a UNESCO site.

Claudine Rozenberg quickly enlisted the support of Sam Galbraith, who was my predecessor. Sam Galbraith and Donald Dewar—both of whom graced this chamber and its proceedings—were firm and longstanding supporters of New Lanark. Over many years, Donald Dewar visited the village. As one of his last acts, he was delighted to sign the UNESCO nomination document. My children remember the First Minister giving a perhaps too long tutorial on the historical significance of the site. It can sometimes be a bit difficult for a child who is but three years old to grasp.

We need to continue the support because A-listed buildings are expensive. The commercial activities of the village provide welcome funding, but the trust needs continuing support for the long-term maintenance of the village buildings. More important, the trust needs security and stability in its finances, so I endorse the comments that Karen Gillon made. Historic Scotland, South Lanarkshire Council and Scottish Enterprise

Lanarkshire all provide assistance, but continuing support beyond the current financial year needs to be considered. I ask the minister to use his good offices to help secure from funders future funding streams for a unique site that holds a special place in the affections of many. As far as it can, the Executive should help ensure that the trust is able to take up the many invitations it receives and will continue to receive.

16:13

Ian Jenkins (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): I, too, congratulate Karen Gillon on securing this debate and on the efforts that she has made for New Lanark over many years. Mike Russell mentioned that we can all remember where we were on 11 September. I can remember where I was when the Manchester United plane crash was announced, where I was when the Cuban missile crisis took the right turn, and where I was when President Kennedy was shot. I will for ever remember being in New Lanark on 11 September.

I was born and brought up in Rothesay, in which there were once mills that had connections with David Dale. Virtually nothing of the mills is left except the names Mill Street and Ladeside Street. When one compares that with what has been achieved in New Lanark, it is obvious that New Lanark is something special that is well worth being a world heritage site.

The architecture of New Lanark is especially impressive because of its unity. When people go down into the valley, they come across a wee village on its own that has been maintained in such a way that they would never know that it was once in the destroyed state shown in photographs in Historic Scotland's document on world heritage site status for the village.

The architects have shown us what to do with mill buildings. In the Borders, mills are being restored individually—although there is nothing on a similar scale to New Lanark, or with similar unity. The example of New Lanark should teach us how to preserve other buildings across Scotland. I am thinking, for example, of the wonderful Gourrock ropeworks building, which should be restored in a similar way to that shown in the Historic Scotland document.

New Lanark is part of our industrial history and heritage. I commend its visitor centre. People who go there will see the looms, the water power systems and so on. It is an educational and historical gem—not only because of the buildings but because of the extracts of Owen's work that are displayed in the school. It is really uplifting. It is an example of utopianism; it is the history of the Co-operative movement; and it is in beautiful

countryside. It has everything to commend it and it is well worth its world heritage site status. The story of the conservation trust is inspiring. I hope that we can learn from it. We congratulate those involved and thank them for their hospitality to the Education, Culture and Sport Committee.

When I read the Historic Scotland document the other night, I noticed Donald Dewar's signature at the end. As others have said, Donald Dewar would have been proud of what has happened. I congratulate the New Lanark Conservation Trust and I congratulate Karen Gillon on drawing Parliament's attention to it.

16:16

Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): I add my congratulations to those of other colleagues to Karen Gillon on securing this debate and congratulate all those who have achieved this great success for New Lanark. We can all be immensely proud of it.

We want to celebrate the importance of New Lanark, partly as the history of ordinary working people and partly as the story of a man who threw down a dangerous challenge—saying that it is possible to treat ordinary working-class people with respect, put them in an environment that is safe and healthy, and still be able to conduct business properly. We want to celebrate New Lanark's success and what it represents in the past, but we also want to celebrate the hope that it offers for the future.

I want to add the congratulations of the Co-operative group of MSPs to those that have already been made. Members may be aware that, every year, New Lanark hosts international Co-operative day. We are all involved in that and very emotionally attached to it. It is always a family day and a day of great celebration. It is an important day in the Co-operative calendar because it reflects the significance of local co-operation as part of an international movement—a movement that goes beyond country and geography and that speaks to the good in us all.

I urge the Executive to look at the way in which New Lanark's success has been secured and to consider the work that was done to get us to this stage. There may be lessons to be learned and other opportunities in other areas of Scotland's heritage. In particular, there may be opportunities to celebrate the collective working-class experience of people in Scotland. There must be other ways in which that can be preserved and celebrated.

The Executive should also consider the more general lessons of New Lanark, looking at ways in which its ideas can be developed in other policy areas—for example in relation to economic

regeneration. What co-operation shows more clearly than anything else is the strength that is released to improve communities when we allow people to work co-operatively within those communities to generate change. I certainly feel that co-operation speaks as a reproach to those who would tell us that we are all interested only in ourselves and that the only way that things can be done is through the deregulation of the economy. In fact, things can very much be done the other way.

As I said, co-operation speaks to the best in all of us. I believe that we have to mark the success of New Lanark not only by recognising the pioneering past that it represents but by seeing it as something that will allow us to focus our minds on how the co-operative model may be translated into other aspects of our work, so that the energy that was released in New Lanark can be released elsewhere—in housing or in other aspects of our society. The co-operative model is often not taken seriously, but it gives us great hope for the future.

I add my congratulations to the people of New Lanark and wish them all the best in celebrating this great achievement.

16:19

David Mundell (South of Scotland) (Con): I, too, congratulate Karen Gillon on securing today's debate. Like many members, I was a regular visit to New Lanark long before I contemplated being a member of the Scottish Parliament. There is a great deal that our new Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport can take from the site. We have heard from various members how the site reflects social history and about its status as a conservation project. People have made the site interesting.

In the past, too many of our attractions in Scotland have simply expected people to turn up and be interested per se in what was presented. One of the great tributes to the New Lanark complex is the way in which it has held out its hand to the visitor and developed services that are friendly towards families and children. Brian Fitzpatrick alluded to three-year-olds. When New Lanark saw that children in particular were more demanding, it developed themed rides through the complex. It has opened up a hotel, which the committee visited. When I worked for BT, I was aware that New Lanark encouraged companies to come and use the facilities for away days and conferences—an important market. At the same time, the project has managed to preserve its integrity.

No one could say that New Lanark has been commercialised through Hollywoodisation. The integrity of the project has been retained. At the

same time the site is user friendly. That is a tremendous factor in its success.

People live at New Lanark. It is not a simple museum site. It is not like Beamish in Northumberland, which is a very popular museum. I never like to disappoint Mike Russell, but when I visited New Lanark in late May I found that there were some Conservative voters, which shows that New Lanark has always been a forward-looking place.

Michael Russell: Will the member give way?

David Mundell: I think that it would be inappropriate to give their names and addresses.

Michael Russell: I am sure that there are so few of them that it would not be a problem. Remember that New Lanark has a great tradition of having days when people dress up and pretend to be things. Perhaps Mr Mundell visited on the very unlikely "dress up and pretend to be a Conservative" day.

David Mundell: I do not think so. They seemed real people to me.

It is very important that real people live in New Lanark. The development of the hotel at the site is also important. New Lanark does not look to the past, but to the future. It is particularly relevant to our tourism industry that it has gone out of its way to be user friendly. That is something that we should promote in Scotland.

16:23

The Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport (Mike Watson): I, too, want to congratulate Karen Gillon on securing this debate. The way in which she made her speech made it clear that she has a strong sense of local pride. I enjoyed the other speeches as well.

As far as I am aware, this is the first time that the Scottish Parliament has debated our built heritage. It is appropriate that we mark that. Scotland has a rich and diverse cultural heritage that bears testimony to thousands of years of human endeavour. It conveys a range of values to society. It has an intrinsic worth and is vital to an understanding of our history. It also provides a sense of place and national identity and is an important social, economic, educational and recreational resource. It enriches the lives of all the people of Scotland.

The jewels in the crown of Scotland's cultural heritage are Scotland's world heritage sites. Until last week there were three: the incredible monuments of neolithic Orkney, Edinburgh's old and new towns and St Kilda, listed for its natural heritage value. Now we have New Lanark—the first industrial site in our country. UNESCO

describes world heritage sites as places or sites of "exceptional universal value, which deserve protection for the benefit of humanity."

New Lanark is a pioneering cotton-spinning village of the late 18th and early 19th centuries. The cotton-spinning mills were powered by water from the Clyde and, next to them, tenement housing was built for the work force. The village has a superb natural setting and is of considerable architectural, technological and historic importance.

New Lanark is most famously associated with Robert Owen, the social reformer, pioneer and entrepreneur. Historic Scotland published an excellent document for the bid to gain world heritage status. It is a very marketable glossy document that extols the virtues of New Lanark:

"The Village Store at New Lanark, founded by Owen in the early 19th century and still a shop today, pioneered a fair trading system, which brought benefits to the community and its users. Profits from the store paid the teachers' salaries. It is regarded by the International Co-operative alliance as the seed-bed of the co-operative movement."

Johann Lamont referred to that as well.

Under Owen's enlightened management, New Lanark became famous as a model community. Owen's publications drew on his experiences at New Lanark. In 1813 he published "A New View of Society" in which he argued that character was formed by circumstances, such as the environment in which an individual was educated and raised, and consequently could be shaped. As I think Karen Gillon said, his ideals were considerably ahead of their time, but they inspired progressive education, factory reform, humane and safe working practices and conditions, international co-operation and even garden cities. New Lanark was a test bed for his rational social system.

I visited New Lanark, not for the first time, last week and noted the buildings there, including the splendidly named Institute for the Formation of Character, but also the school, the store and the counting house. All of them survive to this day and are a testament to Owen. In fact, there are 27 listed buildings on the site and one scheduled monument.

Because of what Owen did, New Lanark is a powerful reminder that the creation of wealth need not involve the exploitation of those who are involved in its production. The village offered a cultural response to the challenges that were presented by industrial society and was the test bed for ideas that sought to reform and reshape humanity—but that would not have secured world heritage site status had it not been for the major restoration programme of the past 25 years or so.

In that respect, it is appropriate to pay tribute, as others have done, to the New Lanark Conservation Trust, which was set up 27 years ago.

More than £30 million of public funds have been invested in New Lanark, a significant proportion of which has been devoted to training projects. More than 2,000 people have received employment training, in particular in the building trades, through the restoration work. Those conservation skills can be and are being applied to the repair of historic buildings throughout Lanarkshire.

New Lanark has also received grants for a variety of capital projects, with major contributions from Historic Scotland which, as an executive agency of the Scottish Executive education department, is responsible for the built heritage of our country. Other funding bodies, such as the heritage lottery fund, have been involved. Most recently, the New Lanark Mill Hotel, formerly mill number one, and Owen's school have benefited from that funding. Discussions are taking place with the three bodies that currently provide New Lanark with annual revenue funding—South Lanarkshire Council, Historic Scotland and Scottish Enterprise Lanarkshire—about the way in which future funding can best be directed.

New Lanark is now a major tourist attraction, with more than 400,000 visitors every year. I would be surprised if that figure did not increase considerably in the light of the award of its new status. The trust encourages visitors to explore the village and visit a variety of its facilities and exhibitions, including the new millennium experience, which utilises innovative audiovisual technology to present Owen's ideas in a way that entertains, informs and inspires. Surveys have repeatedly shown that historic buildings are a major attraction for visitors to Scotland, which is why New Lanark is so important.

I take this opportunity to congratulate the New Lanark Conservation Trust—it is good to see representatives of the trust in the gallery this afternoon—because world heritage status was not a foregone conclusion. The nomination was first made in 1986, but was deferred until UNESCO had formed a view on industrial sites. It was renominated last year, with the booklet to which I have referred, and by the late Donald Dewar. The final decision was taken as recently as last Friday at the world heritage committee of UNESCO in Helsinki.

World heritage status brings with it neither formal extra controls over the affected area nor any additional resources—the designation is more of an accolade—but world heritage status will reinforce and extend the international significance of New Lanark. Without a doubt, the increased awareness will help to promote tourism and the

local economy. The inscription of New Lanark as a world heritage site demonstrates, with our three existing sites, the wealth of Scotland's heritage and our commitment to safeguarding it on behalf of our fellow citizens and the wider world.

Karen Gillon legitimately raised the question of admission charges for educational visits. I wrote to Harry Smith of the New Lanark Conservation Trust on that issue just yesterday. I did not concede the case that he made, but said that the matter will be kept under review. I did that because the decision on admission charges was taken for the national institutions only.

A national audit of Scottish museums, in which New Lanark Conservation Trust is participating, is being carried out by the Scottish Museums Council. I believe that that will provide an opportunity to look at policy on charging for educational visits. I will keep that situation under review because I believe that New Lanark is important as an educational site. That is an issue to which we will return.

The designation of New Lanark as a world heritage site confers upon it a status that I believe not even its architect could have foreseen. However, without Robert Owen there would not be a New Lanark. It should be a source of pride to all Scots that his labours of 200 years ago are now prominently marked on the world stage.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes the debate on New Lanark. To members, to staff, to our guests from New Lanark in the gallery: a happy Christmas.

Meeting closed at 16:31.

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