

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

(ABERDEEN)

Thursday 30 May 2002

Session 1

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Scottish Parliament

Thursday 30 May 2002

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

Scottish Executive's Programme

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): The first item of business is the First Minister's statement on the Executive programme, which will be followed by a debate on the topic. The statement is quite substantial and I ask members who want to ask factual questions to press their buttons, as we will take one or two questions after the statement. Members should not press their buttons to speak in the debate now, but wait until the statement and the questions are out of the way.

09:30

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): We are now entering the final months of this session. Today I will look back briefly at what the Executive—the partnership between Scottish Labour and the Liberal Democrats—has achieved and set out the remainder of our legislative programme for the months until April 2003.

Over the past three years, we have tackled the issues that matter to the people of Scotland and we have enacted legislation that makes a difference to their lives. We have put our partnership to practical use. We have worked with the people of Scotland as well as for them. We have consulted, we have listened and we have acted.

To date, a total of 36 Executive bills have been scrutinised, debated and passed by this Parliament. That achievement has been remarkable not because of the number of bills, but because of the impact of the legislation.

In the past year alone we have given more than 700,000 tenants in social housing greater rights and control and we have increased their protection from anti-social behaviour. We have taken the burden of financial worry away from more than 75,000 pensioners, so they can be confident that they will get the care and support that they deserve in their old age. We will implement free personal care for Scotland's elderly citizens on 1 July this year.

We have brought long-overdue recognition to the 600,000 carers whose daily work lies at the heart of our families and communities. We have increased protection and dignity for victims of

sexual crime. We have allowed young people to plan their future with greater confidence by continuing to improve the efficiency and governance of the Scottish Qualifications Authority. We have introduced free off-peak local bus travel, which will start in October, for more than 1 million pensioners, to give them the opportunity to get more from their daily lives.

For all Scotland's citizens, we have increased accountability, participation and open government through the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Bill and we have underlined our commitment to first-class public services by legislating to improve the public sector ombudsman service.

We have made our water industry more efficient and accountable to this Parliament and we have created the statutory framework to ensure that the water that we drink and use meets the highest standard of quality.

On 8 July this year, we will see Scotland's first national park in Loch Lomond and the Trossachs established—a move to both protect and at the same time allow millions of Scots to enjoy our outstanding natural and cultural heritage.

Those have been some of our most recent achievements. Those actions impact directly on the people of Scotland. They reflect their concerns and have been scrutinised, debated and refined through consultation, the hard work of committees and the engagement of Scots.

The work goes on. In the months ahead, ministers and Parliament will work together through the bills that are before the Parliament's committees. We will work to tackle crime in our Criminal Justice (Scotland) Bill, with public protection as our key objective. We will deal directly with the challenge of high-risk offenders through the creation of a new court sentence—the order for lifelong restriction—and a parallel systematic assessment and management system of those who pose the greatest threat to the safety of our people.

We are putting victims of crime at the heart of our criminal justice system, providing them with the information that they need and the support that they deserve, as well as increasing their participation in the delivery of justice. The bill takes crime seriously by strengthening the protection for victims of stalking and harassment, increasing the penalties for possession and distribution of pornography and taking forward the debate on Scotland's response to young offenders.

The issue of youth crime is important to me. The ministerial group that is considering effective action for those young people who offend persistently brings together ministers from across departments. It is considering action as part of our

overall strategy for tackling youth crime and it will report to the Cabinet before the summer recess. We will make that report public, we will take action on its recommendations and we will take that action quickly.

Earlier this month, we introduced the Local Government in Scotland Bill, which is critical to our determination to build better public services across the country. It proposes a comprehensive package of measures to transform how local government works. It will deliver the best value framework, will introduce a new power of well-being and will provide for community planning, which will give a focus to public services that puts citizens at their centre.

The bill offers an unprecedented opportunity to local government. It creates the framework to bring quality, continuous improvement and community involvement into the heart of what local government does. The bill is designed to allow our local authorities to do the job that they can do best, which is to provide the best-quality services on the ground, every day, to meet the needs of those that they represent.

Our commitment to improving quality extends across all that we do. That is why the public appointments and public bodies bill will propose the establishment of an independent Scottish commissioner for public appointments and the modernisation of the public appointment process. The fact that a statutory responsibility to promote diversity is built into the proposed arrangements will allow us to seek out the best of Scottish talent and to win that for public service. That talent and experience will add value to what we do.

Ours is a Parliament for all Scotland and the devolved Government represents and takes seriously the needs and aspirations of all our people. We are looking forward and we are committed to building a Scotland that is fit for the 21st century. In that Scotland, there will be no place for outdated feudal and land tenure laws and no holding back on sustainable development for our rural communities. Our Land Reform (Scotland) Bill will remove barriers, will create a fair and modern system of land ownership and access and will increase diversity. It will allow rural development to be planned, communities to be involved and the environment to be protected.

To sit alongside the Land Reform (Scotland) Bill, the title conditions bill will be introduced next week. It will mark the final step in the abolition of the feudal system and will simplify the law in respect of real burdens on property.

Our commitment to sustainable development is a commitment for the long term. The water environment and water services bill, which we will publish before the summer, will introduce

important reforms to secure the sustainable use of Scotland's water resources.

Our work in hand includes: taking crime seriously and increasing public safety; building public services through partnership with local authorities; opening up participation in public life to the diversity of talent that we have in Scotland; and protecting our environment and sustaining its development for future generations. However, there is more to do. As we approach the end of the first session of the Parliament, we still have commitments to meet.

For the Executive and for me, there is no more important goal than the protection of our children. It is the central prerequisite to giving our children and young people the best possible start in life. We will not protect our children through one measure alone. I am determined that where we can take action to strengthen the legal framework in favour of our children, we will take such action. We will do our job to minimise the risks that can face our young people.

In the autumn months, we will introduce a bill to increase the protection that we offer. The protection of children bill will increase the safety of Scotland's 1 million children who are under 16—children and young people who take part in youth organisations and clubs and who use education and leisure services and care and advice facilities.

The bill will have two important functions. It will set up an index of adults who are unsuitable to work with children and will disqualify those who are on that index from working with children. The bill will deliver a commitment that I made last year and will fulfil a debt that we owe to the people of Dunblane. Its sections will reflect the outcome of our consultation and will draw on the experience and expertise that lies in our communities.

The bill will of course aim to protect the human rights of those who might be placed on the index and I am sure that members will want to scrutinise the bill carefully to ensure that we reach fair decisions. But let me be clear. For the Executive, there is no greater human right than the right of every child to live in safety and without fear. I hope that the Parliament will endorse the widespread community support for the bill's key proposals.

For too long, people with mental health problems have been at the margins of our society's thinking and of the Government's action. The numbers are significant: mental health problems account for 30 per cent of all general practitioner consultations. The pain and anxiety that such people and their families face is real. Mental health is one of the three clinical priorities for the national health service. We are working to drive up standards of care and reduce the stigma that is suffered by those who are affected.

However, improving mental health services requires a legal framework that is fit for the 21st century and designed to meet the specific needs of the individual. Our proposed bill will create fairer and safer mental health law and bring new rights and new protection to many of the most vulnerable and isolated in our communities. The bill will enable our professionals to do their job flexibly and effectively. Last November, the Parliament achieved a real consensus in the debate on renewing mental health law. That debate and consensus showed this Parliament at its best. I hope that we will work together on the bill to create a modern framework that supports those who need care and the professionals who offer it.

From the outset, we have sought to use the opportunity of this first parliamentary session to take forward our commitment to the principles of social justice. We have taken real, practical steps in legislation and in policy to realise that commitment. Homelessness in all its forms is an affront to those social justice principles. Later this year, we will introduce a bill to tackle that issue head on. Working from the experience and expertise of the homelessness task force that we set up in 1999, we have responded to the task force's recommendations in the early legislative change that was incorporated in part 1 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001.

Everyone in Scotland should have a decent, secure home. Action on housing is action that is central to the delivery of social justice. A warm, dry home contributes directly to better health for all. It is the place from which children can go each morning to school with confidence and security. Well-designed homes and estates act as effective barriers to crime and help to remove the anxiety and fear that damage too many lives today. The new bill will end the current obstacle course for those who need a decent and permanent home by providing additional support to those who need help to sustain a permanent tenancy and by making important changes to the legislative framework.

Improving the legislative framework for homes and tenancies is a commitment that we make to all of Scotland. The agricultural holdings bill will offer choice and security: choice to improve land use and security to develop and grow the business. The bill will build a healthy tenanted sector in which new blood and new ideas can thrive—a healthy tenanted sector to promote the agricultural industry and build in sustainability to our rural communities and environment.

Our commitment to sustainability will continue through the building bill, which will make the building control system more responsive to public and industry needs. The bill will ensure greater consistency in the application of building

standards across Scotland by reinforcing local authority powers to identify and act on dangerous buildings. Sustainability is central to all that we do; it is woven through all our work. The building bill will provide an additional platform to help us achieve our goals now and in the long term.

In that bill and in the others that I have outlined, a central feature will be the critical partnership between the Executive and local government. In March, we published the white paper, "Renewing Local Democracy: The Next Steps", the consultation on which will end in July. Following publication of the white paper, this partnership Executive instructed work to be done to prepare the appropriate clauses to reflect the electoral reform options that were contained in the paper. We have given a firm commitment—which I restate today—that we will consider the responses to the consultation. After the summer recess, we will set out our legislative intentions on the future governance of local authorities.

Let me turn to deal with those areas in which I want to signal our intention to come forward with proposals before the end of this parliamentary year. We are developing proposals to improve the provision of education services for children with special educational needs. At its heart, that work is about closing the opportunity gap in a real and tangible way. However, we want to do it right. We are therefore consulting with those who need additional educational support and with those who provide it to ensure that our proposals are effective and workable in practice.

We are working in the same way to develop proposals for a white paper on planning to make public involvement more meaningful. We will update members on our progress in the coming months.

Members know that the review of adoption is under way. We will publish phase 1 shortly and phase 2 will start later this year. Taking forward the result of that review may well require additional legislative provision. If that proves to be the case, we have decided that the sensible way forward is to include any additional provision in the family law bill. We will therefore publish the draft family law bill when our approach to these areas is fully co-ordinated.

On nature conservation, we will bring forward a draft bill for consultation in the spring of next year and, on crofting reform, we will publish our white paper later this year.

In the months remaining, we intend to bring forward six main bills, including the annual budget bill, and two draft bills. We will continue our consultation and preliminary work in preparation for a further two, on crofting reform and planning. That is a significant work plan for the final year of

the Parliament—for the Executive and for the committees. It is also an important one. In our devolved Government, we do not make laws for headlines: we make laws to improve lives—making a difference to the daily lives of those who sent us here, listening to their views and acting on their concerns.

Since 1999, our devolved Government has put in place legislative change and taken direct action to deliver the positive results that devolution could offer. We have delivered a programme of action and change that we have backed with significant investment. Our programme is about more than the laws that we pass: it is there in the programme for government, in the targets for action that we set ourselves and in the daily work of ministers.

We work from the strong and stable economy that our partnership in the United Kingdom brings. We will continue to push hard for the smart, successful Scotland that we need to improve growth and provide the prosperity to take forward our lifelong commitment to social justice and equality.

Going for growth and building prosperity means encouraging success and taking risks, so we will be consulting shortly to bring forward a draft bill to modernise personal bankruptcy laws and make them fit with the economic future that we are determined that Scotland will have. In that work, we recognise the importance of our transport infrastructure—here in the north-east and across Scotland in our road, sea, rail and air links. We are committed to making the long-term, sustainable improvement that our businesses and our people need. In the coming weeks, Iain Gray will meet Alistair Darling, the new Secretary of State for Transport, to discuss how we can work together to secure the improvements that Scotland needs.

We have a four-year legislative programme and we have action on crime, education, jobs and transport. Over the next five years, our investment in Scotland's health will increase by 50 per cent—but, right now, we spend more than the European Union average on health and still have the worst health record of our European neighbours. We need to put flexibility, choice and primary care at the centre of our health service, and we need to drive forward our commitment to improving this nation's health by investment and reform. This winter, we will publish a white paper on health reform, to introduce proposals to ensure that major investment produces maximum benefit.

Jim Wallace and I have one final proposal to put to members today. Across Scotland, every day, people have to deal with issues that plague their lives—vandalism, graffiti, neighbourhood disputes and litter on their streets. In this chamber, members from all parties know about those problems, share those concerns and want to act.

Indeed, draft bills on litter and dog fouling are already in circulation.

When I became First Minister, I said that I would listen to good ideas, wherever they came from. Today, I offer to work with these members to look together at how we—Executive and Parliament, ministers and members of all parties and none—can most effectively deal with these issues and strengthen the legal framework. We have to give those who need them the powers to improve the quality of all lives throughout Scotland, in every street.

I know that that has not been done before and I know that that has not been how we have worked these past three years. It will be a new way of working, but it is the right way. There will be those who will not like it because they prefer controversy and disagreement. However, in every community throughout Scotland, people who open their door and are sickened by the mess that they see will benefit if we act together. There are issues for the people of Scotland that transcend party difference and political positioning. I hope that all parties will share that view and join us in seeking the best solution that we can—to make a difference.

Presiding Officer, I believe that this week in Aberdeen can be a turning point. It can mark a new way for how we work together, using the powers that we have for the good of the people whom we represent—the people of Scotland. I intend that we will move on, with confidence in our achievements and determination to do still more, making Scotland a better place for all—working with the people of Scotland to build a better future for tomorrow.

The Presiding Officer: Members may ask a few short questions for the purposes of clarification only.

Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP): I welcome the First Minister's statement and thank him for providing a copy in advance. I welcome his statement on consensus. He said that he would listen to good ideas wherever they come from and I can assure him that the SNP has plenty of good ideas.

In the spirit of consensus, will the First Minister support a member's bill to introduce proportional representation for local authorities to ensure that we build a new consensus across the Parliament to change the way in which Scotland's councils are elected? If he will not support such a bill, can I assume from his statement that there will be no legislative proposals on PR before the 2003 elections?

The First Minister: The great quality that is required is to decide what are the good ideas and what are the bad ones. I assure members that we will take on board good ideas, but when we hear

bad ideas, we will point out the faults in them.

On the subject of electoral reform for local government, one of the best things about the Parliament, which is widely recognised across Scotland and was specifically noted in the chamber on Tuesday, is our commitment to consultation in advance of legislation. We are currently consulting on renewing local democracy. That consultation is very important. Electoral systems should be decided not just by politicians, but should take on board the views of Scots throughout our country. That consultation will allow us to point the way forward.

I do not understand how any member can decide whether to support the so-called member's bill on the electoral reform of local government promised by Tricia Marwick—it was promised in November and still has not appeared. The Parliament cannot decide on something that it has not seen. If Mr Swinney wants to have a debate on those proposals, I suggest that he ask Ms Marwick to ensure that the bill is introduced quickly. That will allow us to have the debate and to vote on the bill before moving on to the next step.

David McLetchie (Lothians) (Con): I thank the First Minister for the courtesy of providing us with advance notice of his statement. I have two brief questions. First, in view of the recent revelation of the dominance of Scotland's quangos and public bodies by members of the Labour party, will the First Minister take the opportunity in the public appointments bill to require candidates and appointees to such bodies to declare their membership of political parties?

Secondly, I noticed that the First Minister referred to developing proposals in relation to special educational needs. That is an important area, as we both know. Will he assure me that the proposals will continue to guarantee the grant-aided funding of the seven national special schools, including Donaldson's College, the Craighalbert Centre and the Royal Blind School, the financial independence of which has been threatened by the proposals in the Riddell report?

The First Minister: It is not true to say that the majority of public appointments in Scotland are Labour party members, activists or—as far as any of us in the chamber knows—supporters. It is certainly true to say that of those who have declared a political affiliation, there are fewer Conservatives than Labour party members. That is hardly surprising given the support for the Conservative party in Scotland.

Although it is possible for the two Opposition parties to make cheap jibes about the public appointments process in Scotland, it is important for the Government to take action to ensure the independence of the public appointments system.

The bill that is making progress through the Parliament will make that difference. It will make independent the commissioner for public appointments in Scotland. It will make independent the assessors who advise those who make the recommendations for those appointments.

During that process, I will be happy to consider what additional safeguards might be required to secure public confidence. The public needs to have confidence in people who serve on those public bodies in Scotland that perform an important duty. We are determined to ensure that the system provides them with that confidence. Most people give their service voluntarily and they deserve more support from the Parliament.

On special schools, members know that work has continued ever since the Riddell report was published. Sam Galbraith and I and now Cathy Jamieson have been working, in the chamber and beyond, to discuss the issue before coming to a reasonable and responsible conclusion. I am not going to pre-empt the results of those discussions today any more than I would have accepted automatically the Riddell report's recommendations, which proved controversial among the schools and parents who should be our primary concern.

Scott Barrie (Dunfermline West) (Lab): I welcome the First Minister's commitment to working with the people of Scotland inside and outside of the chamber to improve people's quality of life. Much of the means of achieving that is provided through local government services. Will the First Minister let me know how he proposes to consult with our local government colleagues to achieve the best quality of services, so that we are working co-operatively and not antagonistically?

The First Minister: As I understand it, the member's High Hedges (Scotland) Bill, which has already been introduced to Parliament, involves giving local authorities additional new powers that are more relevant for the 21st century. It is important to involve local authorities in discussions on those matters.

We should ensure that members of all parties who have already declared an interest in those matters should come together before the summer and discuss how to proceed with that work. This morning, I spoke to the president of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and I am sure that COSLA will be delighted to join us at an appropriate time.

Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): I welcome the announcement of the white paper on health reform. Can the First Minister confirm that health promotion will receive an increasing share of health spending, and that the white paper will

consider the most effective ways of achieving and delivering that?

The First Minister: Over the coming months, we will have to consider what, if any, legislative changes will be required to ensure that we get maximum benefit from our investment in health over the next five years. There is a key role for those involved at a local level—in GP surgeries, health centres, well woman and well man clinics—who are delivering the service to the majority of people. Those people have a key role to play in health promotion.

As we consider the reforms that might be required, we want to ensure that those local health services drive the health service rather than being driven by the needs of our hospitals and by other services that previously might have been seen as more significant.

Dorothy-Grace Elder (Glasgow) (Ind): I welcome the commitment to grass-roots issues that cause most concern, including the moves against child pornography. There has been a touch of humility today, which is long overdue.

The Presiding Officer: We must have a question.

Dorothy-Grace Elder: If we listen to the public, we will not go too far wrong.

I have a question about one issue: 130,000 Scots have told the Parliament what they want to be done about chronic pain such as back pain and cancer pain. The Health and Community Care Committee has asked for funding for clinics throughout Scotland. Will the First Minister make that one of his priorities?

The First Minister: I welcome Dorothy-Grace Elder's recognition of the importance of basic issues in the Parliament and the need for us to legislate where we can in order to improve quality of life in our communities.

I know of the work that Dorothy-Grace Elder has done on the issue of chronic pain. I am aware of the interest that was generated on the Parliament's website by the debate in the chamber. The Minister for Health and Community Care, Malcolm Chisholm, keeps the matter under constant review, and I assure Dorothy-Grace Elder that he will continue to do so.

Dr Sylvia Jackson (Stirling) (Lab): Following the Dunblane massacre, everyone will welcome the proposals to further protect our children, but what safeguards will be put in place to protect adults from appearing on the proposed central register as a result of malicious accusations?

The First Minister: That is an important matter, and I touched on it in my statement. The consultation that we conducted last year

highlighted two important factors that were causing concern across Scotland, both of which will be reflected in the final proposals when they are produced.

First, we need to make sure that we include in the register every area of work where adults who are unsuitable might be working with children. We need to make sure that the bill encompasses all areas that may worry parents and children themselves; but we also need to make sure that those who are placed on the register have proper rights of appeal, and that the system is independent, trusted and has the confidence of the people of Scotland. We will ensure in our proposals that that is the case.

The Presiding Officer: We move now to the debate, because I must protect the interests of members who want to speak, and many wish to do so. The screens will be cleared, so I ask members to stop pressing their request-to-speak buttons.

The screens are now cleared, so members who wish to take part in the debate may now press their request-to-speak buttons.

10:01

Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP): I say at the outset that the SNP will support in Parliament a number of measures in the legislative programme that the First Minister has set out today. The measures on protecting children will have wide support. The measures on mental health, which I suspect arise from the Millan commission—which has been supported in the chamber and was supported previously at Westminster by my colleague Margaret Ewing—will be of great importance and we will support them. We welcome, too, the measures on special educational needs, although we express concern at the length of time that it has taken for them to be brought before Parliament. It will be the SNP's natural role to scrutinise the legislation that the Government presents, and we will do that fully within the parliamentary system.

This is the third debate on the Scottish Government's programme and priorities in nine months. Even for new Labour—a party that is synonymous with spin and reannouncement—holding a debate every three months to relaunch the Administration is a bit much. It is not as if the Executive's programme or priorities ever change. The Administration tells us that Labour and the Lib Dems are

“working together delivering stable Government for Scotland”.

It is a gey funny kind of stability. In three years, we have had a First Minister turfed out of office, three social justice ministers, three finance ministers, three education ministers and three enterprise

ministers, but in a remarkable outbreak of stability, we have had only two health ministers. The product is the same; only the sales team keeps changing.

Perhaps the purpose of today's debate is to bring the other members of the Cabinet up to speed. In particular, it must be useful for Jim Wallace to find out what the justice policy is today. Never can there have been such a shambles over an issue as serious as youth crime as that which we have witnessed in the past three weeks from the Executive. Whether it has been the making of policy on the hoof, the leaking of an announcement or the making of a public retraction, the aim has been clear; the policy is nothing to do with tackling youth crime and everything to do with Labour trying to run the justice department on its terms, rather than on Jim Wallace's terms. What a way to carry on a Government.

The Deputy Minister for Justice (Dr Richard Simpson): Does Mr Swinney acknowledge that more than a year ago the Executive put £25 million into a four-year programme to tackle youth crime through a programme of restorative and reparative justice and that therefore to suggest that we are responding to the issue immediately is sheer mischief-making?

Mr Swinney: If Richard Simpson listened to his back benchers every so often he would realise that they say exactly the same thing about the Government. What I said is the reality of how the Government has handled youth crime. The First Minister's plan to imprison parents has proved to be a gimmick too far, even for this Executive—it has led to some stirrings within the coalition. The mighty Liberal Democrat party is restless. It has led to a reawakening—[*Interruption.*]

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

Mr Swinney: That has led to a reawakening of the great Liberal parliamentary tradition of elegance—I mean eloquence. [*Laughter.*] There is no elegance in the U-turns that the Liberal Democrats must make every day. The tradition of oratory of Gladstone and Lloyd George has been replaced by the comments of one sadly anonymous MSP, who said of Mr McConnell's idea of jailing parents:

"This is absolute and total rubbish. They can get stuffed."

That brings a new meaning to "Working Together for Scotland". The First Minister found out the hard way when he tried to get tough; he ended up getting stuffed by the Liberal Democrats.

However, Cathy Jamieson has cleared up the matter. She says that jailing parents is not the first option or the last option. What option is it? Is it the middle option, or is it the option of a panicky First

Minister who blurts out the first thing that comes into his head to cover the lack of coherence in his youth justice strategy?

The youth justice fiasco is symptomatic of an incompetent and incoherent Administration. When the spin is taken away, the failure is laid bare by summing it up with one damning fact: when the Executive came to power, nearly one in three children in Scotland lived in poverty and today, nearly one in three children in Scotland live in poverty. The figures rise each year. I can think of no more compelling argument for urgent political change in our country. [*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Order. Members are getting very excited. Let us listen to the speech.

Mr Swinney: The Executive does not want to hear many points about the programme that it has failed to deliver for the people of Scotland.

However worthy of support it is, once all the legislation is passed, we will have to ask ourselves this question: will Scotland be turned into the best country that it can be? The answer will be a resounding "No."

I will describe how we can achieve the political change that Scotland requires. We can achieve that in two ways. We can use the Parliament's powers in a smarter way to create a better Scotland than the one in which we live today. However, creating a better Scotland is not enough. We must make Scotland the best country that it can be and to do that, we need the full normal powers of independence. We must deliver those powers for Scotland.

First, I will consider what we can do under the current devolution settlement. My party's philosophy on public services is different from that of the Executive parties. We believe that in the public services, the patient and the pupil must come before private profit. That means that new schools and hospitals should be built for the benefit of the community, not of private financiers. The SNP would finance those new buildings through a not-for-profit trust and we would reject the private finance initiative. [*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Order. Just a minute, Mr Swinney. Before anyone intervenes, I say that the First Minister was listened to properly and that members must listen to the leader of the SNP, too.

George Lyon (Argyll and Bute) (LD): If Mr Swinney rules out the use of PFI, how would he build all the new hospitals and schools? Would they all shut?

Mr Swinney: We will build the new schools and hospitals by funding them through a not-for-profit trust. We will reject the private finance initiative. In the process, we will save the public purse hundreds of millions of pounds, which can be

invested in front-line care services for the people of Scotland.

Under PFI, hospitals are forced to make huge repayments to private consortiums, which makes the scheme ludicrously expensive and bad value for taxpayers. Last week, Professor Allyson Pollock—an independent academic who is an expert on PFI—said in the *BMJ British Medical Journal*:

“the high cost of PFI schemes has presented NHS trusts with an affordability gap. This has been closed by external subsidies, the diversion of funds from clinical budgets, sales of assets, appeals for charitable donations and, crucially, by 30% cuts in bed capacity and 20% reductions in staff in hospitals financed through PFI.”

We would replace PFI with a not-for-profit trust that would bring with it the guarantee that every hospital that it was planned would be built under PFI would be built under a not-for-profit trust. That would stop the bed cuts and bring an end to reductions in staff numbers.

Our goal is to ensure that the national health service in Scotland is restored to being a genuinely public service. The restoration of that service, along with the democratic controls that go with the changes in the health service that we want to put in place, will restore a genuine sense of ownership by the public. It will also give much greater control to local health service co-operatives in controlling their budgets, in commissioning care, in delivery and in responding to local requirements.

Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con): Will the member take an intervention?

Mr Swinney: I am sorry, Phil, I am running short of time and I have a great distance yet to cover.

An SNP Government would herald improvements not only in health, but across public services. In addressing education, the SNP would drive down class sizes to a maximum of 18 for the youngest children, which would give our children the best start in life. The SNP would begin that improvement in the most deprived areas.

In the fight against crime, the SNP would extend the existing legal responsibility of parents for the actions of their children. We would introduce compensation orders so that the victims of crime are not left to pay the costs of damage to their property.

In those and other ways, the SNP would use the existing powers of the Parliament to create a better Scotland. We would ensure that the NHS was once again a genuine public service. We would give Scotland's children the maximum opportunity to learn and we would introduce sensible workable measures that would make the streets of Scotland safer. I am under no illusions—we will create the best Scotland only when

Scotland is equipped with the normal powers of independence. The Scottish Parliament has been a job worth doing, but it is a job that is half done.

Today's programme for government fails to address the core problem that leads to so many other problems and difficulties for people in Scotland. That core problem is the lack of any real power to turn around the Scottish economy and to reverse the steady relative decline that Scotland has endured in the United Kingdom. In the past 30 years, Scotland's economy has grown more slowly than has the economy in the rest of the United Kingdom and it has grown more slowly than the economies of our European counterparts. The only measure that the First Minister announced in the programme for government to improve the performance of the Scottish economy is the introduction of a review of our bankruptcy laws. As welcome as that introduction might be, it is not the kick-start that the Scottish economy requires in order to improve our performance.

Phil Gallie: I remind Mr Swinney that, between 1993 and 1997, the Scottish economy grew at a far greater rate than the economy in most areas of England. At that time, the Scottish economy was the fourth highest in the UK.

Mr Swinney: During that period of Conservative rule, Scotland had a massive price to pay in economic terms for the failure of the United Kingdom under Conservative Governments. If the Scottish economy had grown at the same rate as the Irish economy over the past 30 years—[MEMBERS: “Oh!”] Members may say, “Oh!” but Ireland is a small, independent country that is able to generate vibrant economic growth. We cannot do that here because Labour takes its orders from London. That is the problem that we have in the Scottish economy today.

The Executive does not trust itself or anyone else in Scotland with the powers that would enable it to tackle the performance gap, boost growth and increase the money that is available for public services. An SNP government in an independent Scotland that was equipped with full economic powers would put Scottish business at a competitive tax advantage. An SNP government would reduce the taxes on growth and so give Scottish firms and the Scottish economy a major boost. In a hugely competitive global economy, all other countries seek constantly to give their companies that sort of clear advantage.

In such an environment, we simply cannot afford to sit on the sidelines, shrug our shoulders and pass the responsibility to somebody else. With independence, Scotland could break out of the dependency culture that discourages decision making and innovation. The SNP would set a target—a national target—for us all to unite behind; one that would bind together all our policy

initiatives with the clear purpose of doubling our appalling trend rate of economic growth and giving a clear theme and purpose to government in Scotland.

Boosting economic growth is not just about increasing incomes—

Ms Wendy Alexander (Paisley North) (Lab): Will the member give way?

Mr Swinney: Well, my time is—*[Interruption.]* I have got—*[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Order. Mr Swinney is in his last minute.

Mr Swinney: The Presiding Officer has told me that I am in the last minute of my speech. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Order.

Ms Alexander *rose—*

Mr Swinney: The former Minister for Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning had every opportunity to change the Scottish economy, but she failed to do so. Because she could not deliver when she was in office, she now wants to intervene in order to change the record.

Boosting economic growth means more than simply increasing incomes and the tax revenue that is available for public services. Such growth, allied to a progressive tax system, is the key to an effective anti-poverty strategy in Scotland and to generating the opportunities, ambition, hope, confidence and self-esteem that are necessary to tackle poverty and deliver social justice. Although the Executive says that it is committed to cutting child poverty, it does not want the powers to boost economic growth that would allow it to achieve that objective.

We know for a fact that this country has underperformed in the UK and that other countries have outperformed our abilities and achievements. However, they have been able to do so because they have taken control of their own futures and have decided to take responsibility for their own decisions. The SNP will not listen to Labour's bosses in London who take the big decisions, but will instead trust its own people. The SNP is prepared to trust the people of Scotland to ensure that it delivers ambition, high esteem and prosperity. We will deliver the very best for Scotland through our political agenda of independence.

The Presiding Officer: I allowed Mr Swinney an extra minute because of the barracking he received. I hope that we will not have any more of that during Mr McLetchie's speech.

I call Mr McLetchie.

Members: Waay!

10:17

David McLetchie (Lothians) (Con): Thank you.

The First Minister has lost little time in destroying one of the Parliament's early traditions by depriving us of the annual September debate on the Executive's legislative programme. However, some things never change. Although we will be able to support some of the programme's measures such as the mental health bill and the reform of personal bankruptcy laws, I feel that this latest hotchpotch of laws will be no substitute for a coherent programme that addresses the concerns of people in Scotland. The lack of such coherence is still the Achilles' heel of the Labour-Liberal Scottish Executive.

Instead of signalling a fresh start, Mr McConnell's reign as First Minister has seen a continuation of the confusion and lack of direction that has characterised the Executive from day one. Of course, Mr McConnell has added some novel twists of his own. For example, his deep commitment to the principle of individualism is truly original. In his Executive, only one voice counts and his favourite sound is the echo, particularly from his Cabinet. That explains the presence of so many discordant voices on his back benches. However, in other respects, the record is the same drearily familiar litany of broken promises and dashed expectations.

The First Minister promised that he would "do less, better". However, he has succeeded only in elevating dullness to a theory of government when there is clearly a need for reform. He promised that he would talk "the language of priorities". However, all we have seen is an ever-lengthening list of priorities in which everything—and, as a result, nothing—is a priority. Moreover, although he promised to end the culture of spin and to deliver action, he is even more addicted to meaningless soundbites than were his predecessors.

The truth of the matter is that the First Minister has tried and, as he showed today, continues to try to blur the lines of responsibility between the Scottish Executive and the Scottish Parliament in order to evade his own responsibility and that of his Administration. However, despite such attempts, the public is becoming increasingly aware that the Executive—the Labour and Liberal Democrat parties—are the real culprits in the continuing failure to improve our public services.

In fairness, there are some rays of light and hope, and it is no surprise that they are to be found where the Executive has adopted Conservative policies or moved in our direction. For instance, the Executive has made much of the

apparent reduction in waiting times for NHS patients as a result of Malcolm Chisholm's new waiting times unit. However, a key factor in achieving that reduction is the 2,000 operations that are being performed by the independent sector on NHS patients. That demonstrates clearly how greater co-operation between the NHS and the independent sector benefits all patients in Scotland. The frustration is that, although the Scottish Executive is willing to go so far, it will not cast off its ideological blinkers and extend that partnership for the benefit of all NHS patients by entering into a concordat with the independent sector, as has happened down south. We have been advocating that in this Parliament for the past three years.

It is no coincidence that, where the Scottish Executive has made tentative strides in our direction, it has achieved a modicum of improvement. I just wish that it would acknowledge its debt and have the courage to go the whole hog; however, humility is not something for which the Labour and Liberal Democrat parties are noted. Indeed, their brass neck was demonstrated by Malcolm Chisholm's recent announcement about devolving power to general practitioners and primary care teams within the health service. Although we have yet to see what that would mean in practice, in essence it appears to be remarkably similar to our successful fundholding system, which empowered GPs and patients and led to many practical improvements in primary care in Scotland. It is the same fundholding system that Labour wasted millions of pounds abolishing for purely ideological reasons in an act of political vandalism. Instead of trying to finesse a political U-turn, Malcolm Chisholm should apologise for his failure and for the failure of his predecessors to build on our reforms, and for the time that has been wasted and the money that has been lost over the past five years.

Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD): Will Mr McLetchie tell us how many general practitioners took up the option of fundholding?

David McLetchie: More than 50 per cent of GPs took up fundholding options in Scotland before the system was abolished. It is a fact that, as a result of fundholding, many substantial improvements were made in the services that were available to patients in local surgeries, which are now under threat because of the act of political vandalism that abolished a system that was succeeding.

The Minister for Health and Community Care (Malcolm Chisholm): Will Mr McLetchie give way?

David McLetchie: I am sorry, but I do not intend to give way again at this point. I will come back to Mr Chisholm later.

The problem is that the Executive has no clear understanding of the problems in our public services and so cannot come up with a coherent set of solutions. Any superficial changes that it makes are not born of conviction or of recognition that its whole top-down, micromanaging, centralising approach has failed. Instead, the Executive is driven by pure political expediency and by the desperate and frantic search for something to save its members' collective political skin. That piecemeal pick-and-mix approach will not deliver sustained improvements in the performance of our public services. It is pure opportunism and is based on a political vision that can see no further than 1 May 2003.

What is even more frustrating is the sheer dishonesty that is at the heart of the Executive's approach. We welcome genuine converts, but the Executive's rhetoric often far outstrips the reality of its actions. It is a pattern that we have seen time and again. As evidence accumulates of the Executive's failure to tackle the problems that face people in Scotland, Mr McConnell tries to pretend that that has nothing to do with him, but then launches a phoney crusade to sort the problem out.

We have seen that most recently in education. Growing concerns about standards in our schools have been met with a call for a great debate and the extraordinary sight of Cathy Jamieson calling for greater diversity and choice. In the interests of a better education policy for Scotland, I am prepared to suspend my disbelief. We have been saying for some time that the one-size-fits-all approach that is associated with comprehensive education is failing too many children in Scotland and that we need a more flexible and diverse system to meet their needs.

However, it is one thing for Cathy Jamieson to say such things as a response to criticisms of Executive policies, but it is quite another to put those ideas into practice, particularly when they are contrary to the political principles on which she has founded her entire political career. After all, it was not so long ago that Ms Jamieson was a staunch defender of clause 4. [*Interruption.*] She still is—that is interesting.

The Executive may talk about greater diversity in education, but it must be judged on its actions and not its words. Currently, the Executive stands condemned for bullying a small and successful primary school in Dunblane back into local authority control against the wishes of parents, teachers and the local community. That is hardly evidence of a genuine belief in diversity and choice. Who was the playground bully? None other than the First Minister in a previous ministerial incarnation.

The same gap between rhetoric and reality is

evident in health. The Executive talks about a pragmatic modernising agenda and partnership between the public sector and the independent sector, but it has done little to implement that in respect of the health service. Indeed, its much-vaunted policy of “Scottish solutions to Scottish problems” amounts to a rejection of the limited but welcome moves that are being made south of the border, such as devolving real power to hospitals, granting franchises to improve management performance in underperforming hospitals and signing a proper concordat and arrangements for partnership with the independent sector. The words “Scottish solutions to Scottish problems” are simply code words for no change and no progress. As in education, such failures—which are born of dogma in the delivery of our public services—bear most heavily on the most vulnerable members of our society.

The latest bandwagon on which Mr McConnell has jumped is youth crime and youth justice. It is amazing how a few heckles in the Labour heartlands can push issues up the agenda and waken some people up to reality. In fairness, at least that is preferable to the Liberal Democrats’ attitude. They express their usual high-minded disdain for the concerns of ordinary people who seek protection from young thugs who terrorise their neighbourhoods.

Mr Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): Will the member explain his policies? Are they the same as those that Phil Gallie has espoused in Aberdeen? Does the member propose that there should be a referendum on flogging kids?

David McLetchie: I will explain our policies in a moment.

The discord between the parties in the Executive hardly bodes well for a coherent approach. Oxford has Morse and Lewis, New York has Starsky and Hutch, Gotham City has Batman and Robin, but we have Jim and Jack. “Let the criminals go,” Jim says. “Lock up their mothers,” Jack says. The big softie meets the wee pretendy hard man. I hold out little hope for the deliberations of the Cabinet committee with a crime-fighting duo such as those two.

If Mr McConnell is serious about tackling youth crime, is he prepared to look with an open mind at practical measures such as more secure accommodation, sin bins, compulsory grounding and community service orders, which the Conservative party has advocated for the past three years? If there is to be a genuine review of youth justice, why do not we start by ditching the ridiculous proposal to extend the children’s hearing system to 16-year-olds and 17-year-olds at a time when that system is patently failing to cope with younger offenders?

The Presiding Officer: The member has a minute left.

David McLetchie: It is all very well to bluster on about jailing mums and to talk about youth courts and inclusion or exclusion orders, but the public wants action here and now from the Executive. They do not want promises in Labour’s next election manifesto—we all know what happens to most of those. Why cannot the Executive put in the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Bill, which is before the Parliament, measures that are under consideration by a Cabinet committee? Is it because members of the Executive cannot agree among themselves? Is the partnership Government now a paralysis Government?

It is extraordinary that members who speak so much in the chamber about social justice fail to understand that that can be built only on a foundation of effective justice and of law and order in our communities. Without that, efforts will be frustrated, money will be wasted and lives will continue to be blighted. Because of the failure to tackle the fundamentals of health, education and crime, the Executive’s programme is disappointing and will disappoint. It is the flawed and incoherent programme of a tired and fractious Administration that is at odds with itself. It needs a rest; next year, we can give it one.

10:30

Nicol Stephen (Aberdeen South) (LD): It is a great honour to speak in the chamber here in Aberdeen. It is my home city, the area that I represent in the Parliament and the city in which I live.

Sometimes people say that one can sense the future. When I entered my first university lecture theatre, about 100 paces from here, when I got married in the university chapel, about 120 paces from here, or when I used to study in the university library, which was in this very place, never would I have believed that we would be sitting here today in the Scottish Parliament.

Given what I said about my wedding, it would be wrong of me to say that this is the greatest moment for me in my association with this ancient university, but it is certainly a very special occasion. [MEMBERS: “Is your wife here?”] Yes, she is.

This is the sort of speech in which I could drift a very long way from the Executive’s programme for government, although I hasten to add not as far away from the chamber as many SNP members are this morning.

Before I move on, it is appropriate on our final day in Aberdeen to pay tribute to all the people and organisations—in particular Aberdeen City

Council and our hosts, the University of Aberdeen—that have made our visit such a success.

The Liberal Democrats have long campaigned for a Parliament that represents all Scotland, not only one geographical area or one group of people. That was one of the key themes of the First Minister's statement on the Executive's programmes for the coming 12 months—or, more accurately, for members of a nervous disposition, for the 335 days until 1 May 2003.

Much has been achieved. For most members, it is outstandingly good news to learn that this week, in among her punishing schedule of jubilee engagements, the Queen has given royal assent to the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002. The Liberal Democrat-Labour partnership—and many other members of the Parliament—are justifiably proud of many other policies. Those include the introduction from 1 July of free personal care for the elderly, the abolition of tuition fees and the reintroduction of student grants for young people from Scotland's poorest families, which is of special importance in this city as it is the home of two of Scotland's great universities—the University of Aberdeen and the Robert Gordon University—as well as Aberdeen College, which is the largest college in the country. Those policies have led to a very significant increase in applications throughout Scotland, including here in Aberdeen, for places in higher education.

Andrew Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP): Will Nicol Stephen give way?

Nicol Stephen: No thank you. I must move on.

Those policies prove that the Scottish Parliament is starting to make a difference to many thousands of Scots. We must now build on the early successes if we are to develop a Parliament that builds Scotland's confidence.

I will focus on three key areas. The first is the elderly. The proposals to deliver free off-peak travel to every pensioner in Scotland build on the measures for free central heating and free personal care. Today's proposals on crime and justice and the record number of police officers throughout Scotland will give older people extra security in their homes.

Secondly, the proposals on land reform and agricultural holdings and the proposed white paper on crofting reform, along with the publication of a bill on nature conservation, emphasise that this is and must be a Parliament for all parts of Scotland—for the rural communities, the north-east, the Highlands, the Borders and the islands, every bit as much as for the central belt of Scotland. I hope that in his winding-up speech the Deputy First Minister will make it clear what progress will be made on Nora Radcliffe's

proposals to tackle wildlife crime.

Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP): The minister has not yet mentioned proportional representation. Will he do so? If not, is it a case of PR RIP?

Nicol Stephen: I am happy to mention proportional representation. I emphasise that there is agreement on the issue in the Executive and between the Labour party and the Liberal Democrats. We have agreed on the next steps and we will put the matter out to consultation. *[Laughter.]* We have agreed more than that—we have agreed on the drafting of measures to allow us to implement the consultation proposals. Members know that we will outline the next steps in September. That is the agreement.

I move to the third area that I want to emphasise. As Deputy Minister for Education and Young People, I believe that the most important matter on which we must keep up the momentum is that of our young people. The groundbreaking national agreement on pay and conditions for teachers is not the only major progress that we have made on that issue. I was first elected to Grampian Regional Council 20 years ago this month. In 1982, the council was Conservative controlled. At that time, there was the disgrace of purpose-built nursery units lying empty in the north-east because the Conservatives refused to fund their opening. We will deliver nursery places not only for all four-year-olds in Scotland, but for every three-year-old whose parents want one.

We will deliver on our new commitments. We will help to protect young people by delivering an index of adults who are unsuitable to work with children. We will progress with our proposed changes to the record-of-needs system for children with special educational needs. We will revise the legislation on adoption. We will progress significant reviews on the simplification of the assessment system in Scotland's schools and on education for work and enterprise.

Getting enterprise education right is crucial to Scotland's future. Aberdeen is the home of Sir Ian Wood, whose John Wood Group will have a public flotation for the first time in the next few days, of Moir Lockhead of FirstGroup, of Martin Gilbert of Aberdeen Asset Management, and of other leading entrepreneurs such as Ian Suttie, Jimmy Milne, Stewart Milne, and, on the global stage, Euan Baird of Schlumberger. There could not be a better place to emphasise the importance of enterprise in our schools.

We are determined to make significant progress on the condition of Scotland's school buildings, many of which suffer all too plainly from decades of neglect. I have seen outstanding schools in Scotland that operate in disgraceful conditions.

The importance of major new investment in our schools is clear and the Executive is determined to deliver on that. We will not destroy the opportunity with the type of destructive dogma that we have heard yet again from the SNP.

I will briefly refer again to Aberdeen and the University of Aberdeen. The week has been a good one for Aberdeen's politicians, not only in the Scottish Parliament. It is an issue for debate whether the new Secretary of State for Transport would rather be here in his old university or taking up his new office at Westminster. More important, the week has been a good one for the people of Aberdeen and the north-east. The big issues that affect the north-east have not been ducked: we have discussed the oil and gas industry, the need for a city bypass and the local drugs problem.

Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP): Will the minister take an intervention?

Nicol Stephen: No, I am about to finish.

We have also heard about and celebrated the successes of the north-east. I am clear that, without the successes of the Scottish Parliament, the Food Standards Agency, for example, would not be located in Aberdeen. More needs to be done. That is why we are having the debate and why we have had the week in Aberdeen. Aberdeen has been proud to host the Parliament. Our message to everyone who has come here this week—especially to my 100 plus colleagues who do not represent the north-east—is simple: haste ye back.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr Murray Tosh): As there is a long list of members who want to speak, I ask members to speak for around four minutes. I call Des McNulty, to be followed by Andrew Wilson.

10:40

Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab): Whatever disagreements there may be between the political parties, most people accept the First Minister's definition of jobs, education, health, crime and transport as our key priorities. Effective action on those priorities is not always achieved through legislation. Equally, we cannot always determine the subjects on which we will legislate and the content of legislation purely on the basis of the issues that are bothering people the most at any given time.

The legislative programme that the First Minister has announced—especially the bills on the protection of children, on sustainable environmental management and on a new framework for mental health treatment—will be widely welcomed. The bills represent an important set of legislative tasks for the coming year. By the

end of the first session of the Scottish Parliament, we will have a solid body of legislative achievement. The contrast with what was possible prior to devolution is striking.

I welcome the emphasis that the First Minister has placed on measures to improve the quality of life and the cross-party approach to the issue that he is proposing. Earlier in the week, we heard about some of the problems that communities are experiencing as a result of youth disorder. It is generally recognised that the law enforcement and justice systems have failed to address adequately the harassment, intimidation and vandalism that make lives a misery. In that debate, Johann Lamont argued that the emphasis of the law enforcement and justice systems needs to be shifted in favour of the rights of victims. She said that vital components of an appropriate response to crime are

"the way in which a person is treated when they report a crime, the police's response and how people are kept informed of what has happened to those who perpetrate crimes."—[*Official Report*, 28 May 2002; Vol 4, c 12171.]

To tackle youth crime effectively and to address the major concerns that people have, we must involve families and communities far more in those tasks. The justice system can be criticised for being offender centred, with little or no role for the people who are most affected by offending behaviour once the professionals have taken charge and the system cranks into gear. Likewise, the education and health services have traditionally been dominated by professionals who determine what is appropriate for pupils and patients. We can no longer leave the parent at the school gate or confine our efforts to improve health to the treatment of the sick. If it is properly handled and managed, community involvement can be a crucial dimension in achieving effective solutions and the rights of parents and families in the community at large must be respected.

The Executive has done a great deal to progress that agenda, through measures such as the creation of new community schools. However, more active engagement of families and community members in the delivery of specifications for services is vital if we are to meet the needs and aspirations of the people of Scotland. The fact that constituents are looking to the Scottish Parliament to address issues such as dog fouling, high hedges and other matters that reduce their quality of life highlights a breakdown of the informal norms or rules that used to condition behaviour in local neighbourhoods.

We may differ on what we consider acceptable and unacceptable. In many ways, we have become a more tolerant society, less prejudiced regarding religious and ethnic differences and more open to change. However, we have perhaps

also become less considerate of others and less willing to look out for others. The trend to which I am pointing is not universal. Like many members, I can point to outstanding examples of community service and involvement in my constituency. It may be inappropriate to talk about litter as a national problem in a city where the streets are remarkably clean. Nonetheless, there is a trend towards behaviour that, although not illegal, is to the detriment of the interests of others in the wider community.

The Parliament has the power to legislate, and the First Minister is making an important change in saying that he will support what individual members such as Keith Harding and Scott Barrie are trying to achieve. That must be accompanied by a general willingness to empower communities much more. Modernising our public services must mean much more than using computers; it should include making services more responsive to the needs and wishes of local communities. One of the great strengths of the Parliament has been the impact that local organisations, representative bodies and experts of all kinds have had on policy making and the legislative process. The Transport and the Environment Committee, of which I am a member, has responded directly to concerns about telephone masts, aquaculture, the dumping of human and animal waste, and ferry services—to name but a few issues.

Other committees have done likewise. Our democracy is all the richer for the work that has been done. However, we have more to do and the community dimension is crucial. Scotland is a small country, but it has a rich diversity of interests and circumstances, from remote rural areas to major urban centres. If we are to succeed, Parliament must demonstrate that it is listening and is acting to deliver meaningful and measurable improvements in people's lives. The First Minister outlined a programme of legislation and announced consultation steps that will prefigure legislation. Those are important steps towards delivering the real changes that I believe we are all here to deliver.

10:45

Andrew Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP): I am all for vigorous and atmospheric debate. The Executive flange is quiet at present, but the demeaning behaviour of some members at the start of the debate did no favours to the Parliament. Labour members—[*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Andrew Wilson: Labour members and high-paid ministers should observe some decorum. The tape of proceedings will show that they were honking like howler monkeys on a bellyful of cider

rather than behaving as serious politicians addressing the nation's questions.

The serious issue that I want to open with—[*Interruption.*] If I may say so, ministers should closely examine their behaviour.

Those of us who believe that Parliament should focus on the strong issues that affect this nation should reflect on what the First Minister said in his statement. He said that the whole programme works from

“the strong and stable economy that our partnership in the United Kingdom brings.”

Mr McConnell has left the chamber, but let us examine that “strong and stable economy.” In the last quarter, growth was 0.1 per cent. Over the year, the long-term trend was one third of the UK annual rate. Business liquidations are up and business start-ups are down. The construction industry and manufacturing are in recession. Our level of research and development is half the UK rate. Since 1995, we have created one job for every 175 that have been created in the UK. Our employment rate is lower than the UK's. If we had kept pace with the UK, there would be 51,000 more people in employment in Scotland today. The number of new deal starts is down. In the year to April, unemployment was up by 14,000 and employment was down by 21,000.

Mr McConnell described all that as “strong and stable”. How can we hope to have a serious debate about Scotland's future when our supposed leader—the First Minister—cannot examine the problem? It is no wonder that Wendy Alexander walked; the complacency and lack of interest of the Executive is evident for all to see. In the face of utter mediocrity in our economic performance, Mr McConnell plays faction politics with his ministerial portfolios. I wish Mr Gray well in his new job. It is not his fault that Mr McConnell offered Mr Gray's position to Mr Wallace before alighting on Mr Gray. However, Mr Gray's first statement that it must be steady as she goes—with an economy that is failing—does not make the people of Scotland confident.

The harsh reality, as John Swinney said, is that the UK and Scotland are in relative decline.

Rhona Brankin (Midlothian) (Lab): Will the member give way?

Andrew Wilson: I would be delighted to give way to one of the quieter members of the Executive flange.

Rhona Brankin: I am glad that one of the quieter members of the Scottish National Party is giving way.

Mr Wilson talks about economic stability. His party is committed to lowering taxes and is

apparently committed to abolishing public-private partnerships. However, the SNP is also committed to increasing public spending. Can Mr Wilson explain, for the benefit of members, where the SNP's money is going to come from?

Andrew Wilson: That usefully points to the nub of the debate. The people of Scotland have two options. One is to buy into continuous and guaranteed relative decline under the status quo, in which growth declines compared with that of the rest of the UK and the money available for investment declines with it. The other option is to go for growth, place Scotland at a competitive advantage and invest the results in our public services. In the 19th century, the UK was first in the world, but today it is 19th. Scotland has followed suit and is declining relatively within the UK.

The status quo, which is many members' reason to be, is not sustainable. If members buy the status quo, they buy guaranteed relative decline and we will all be here in four years' time doing the same thing that we have done today: talking about high hedges and dog fouling and dealing with the symptoms of the nation's decline rather than getting to the roots of the core problems that face us. Devolution has given the people of Scotland great expectations, but it has not equipped us with new powers to deliver. To do that, we must recognise and accept the problem and behave like serious politicians rather than immature ones. *[Interruption.]* The Labour members make my point for me.

We must garner a national consensus behind the need for growth and a focus on an enterprise economy, so that we can deal with not just the symptoms but the core problems. As John Swinney said, the issue is one of trust—trust in ourselves and trust in the people of Scotland. The SNP sets no bounds to that trust or to the powers that the Scottish Parliament must have. The Labour party does. If the Labour party trusts the people with responsibility for elderly care, why not with responsibility for pensions? If it trusts them with roads, why not with railways? If it trusts them with education, why not with the tax powers to ensure that it is properly funded? Unless we equip ourselves with the real powers that real countries have, we will be here in four years' time with bad behaviour and irrelevant points rather than a focus on what the people want. Gaining those powers requires independence.

10:51

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Like Nicol Stephen, I was a student at the University of Aberdeen. Of course, that was in the good old days of the Conservative Government, before we had tuition fees and graduate taxes.

However, before I am overcome by nostalgia, I will deal with the Executive's programme and what it offers rural Scotland.

What does the programme offer rural Scotland? The conclusion must be that it offers nothing of any value. This week, the revised farm income forecast for 2001 was announced. It made depressing reading. Since 1997, farm incomes have plummeted. There cannot be a farmer in Scotland who would not trade his income today for the one that he had under the previous Conservative Government. On Friday, I was speaking to farmers in Fife who expressed dismay at the current state of Scottish agriculture and could see little hope for the future. They see the Executive doing nothing that might help them. What galls them in particular is the fact that the Minister for Environment and Rural Development spends his time introducing bills that will increase the burdens on the farming community rather than reduce them.

The Land Reform (Scotland) Bill opens up access to lowland farms and will increase the costs on farmers. Whatever the Executive believes, that is the view of the farming community.

George Lyon: Will the member take an intervention?

Murdo Fraser: I might let George Lyon in later.

George Lyon: I am simply asking for clarification.

Murdo Fraser: No.

The draft agricultural holdings bill should have been a piece of legislation that delivered long-overdue modernisation of the law in that area. A consensus as to the way forward had been reached between the National Farmers Union Scotland and the Scottish Landowners Federation. However, the minister has thrown a spanner in the works by introducing a tenant right to buy. That is causing huge concern in the agriculture community across Scotland. As I speak, land agents across Scotland are desperately trying to find ways to terminate existing limited partnership agreements, fearful that any sort of tenancy will eventually be granted a right to buy. Landowners who wish to preserve the integrity of their estates are refusing to let land under any arrangements.

In the foreword to the draft bill consultation paper, the minister writes:

"The industry's adaptability and rejuvenation will be aided by encouraging new blood and new ideas into agriculture. Stimulating a healthy tenanted sector is an important step in attracting that new blood and those new ideas."

Those are fine words, which were echoed by the First Minister today. However, I presume that they were written before the right to buy was included

in the bill. It is as clear as day that the bill is already having precisely the opposite effect.

George Lyon: Will the member take an intervention?

Murdo Fraser: I will take an intervention as I know that George Lyon has a deep personal interest in this matter.

George Lyon: Murdo Fraser fully supported the introduction of the right to buy for tenants of council houses. What is the difference between council tenants and farm tenants?

Murdo Fraser: George Lyon was not a council tenant, but he is a farm tenant. The fact is, the council houses belonged to the state and the state was quite right to change the contract between landlord and tenant. In relation to farms, the landlord and the tenant are private individuals.

The introduction to the consultation paper goes on to say:

"Landowners need to feel able to let land with assurance".

That is another failure, because no landowner is letting any land as a result of this bill, with assurance or otherwise. The introduction also says:

"Greater certainty over the length and terms of leases ... should also help to cultivate a positive, forward-looking relationship between landlord and tenant."

That would be fine, but the bill does nothing to encourage positive and forward-looking relationships. It does quite the opposite. All the evidence is that the right-to-buy proposals in the bill will be a disaster for the tenanted sector. Even Ross Finnie agrees with that. During a ministerial statement on the matter in May 2000, he outlined the Executive's opposition to right-to-buy proposals in these words:

"We are trying to move towards a situation of greater diversity, in which more leases will be offered. Neither the consultative group that existed before we took office nor that which was set up afterwards proved that instituting a tenant's right to buy would do anything other than dry up a limited supply. We were not persuaded that that was consistent with our aim of getting new tenants."—[*Official Report*, 17 May 2000; Vol 6, c 695.]

I could not agree more. Why the change of heart? Could it have something to do with the lobbying by George Lyon who, as a tenant farmer, stands to benefit from the right to buy? We should be told.

The Land Reform (Scotland) Bill is likely to have a more sinister and damaging effect on Scottish agriculture. If the letting of land is no longer acceptable to landowners, many will put their land on the market for sale. The sudden deluge of land on the property market will reduce land values. Why are land values important? They are important because farmers use the value of land

to support their bank borrowings, especially in difficult times such as those that we have now. If land values fall and banks start to call in their borrowings, that will have a catastrophic effect on Scottish farming. Has the minister considered that?

The Land Reform (Scotland) Bill is another misguided measure from an Executive that does not understand rural Scotland. Scottish farmers look to the Executive for help in their present time of crisis and all that the Executive does is introduce a bill and tenant's right to buy that, at best, are distractions from the real problems of rural Scotland.

The Executive thinks that, when the elections come next year, it can tick the box that is marked "rural Scotland" and say, "We've dealt with that. It hasn't cost us anything, but we have legislated and demonstrated our concern." I have news for the Executive: rural Scotland can see through its cynical ploy. In three years, it has done nothing for rural communities. There is nothing for them in the legislative programme that the Executive announced today. They will not forget that at the elections next year.

10:56

Bristow Muldoon (Livingston) (Lab): Before I make my main comments, I will comment on Andrew Wilson's speech, in which he rather sanctimoniously lectured the Parliament. Anyone who knows the Parliament well knows that Mr Wilson is one of the most regular contributors of snide and childish jibes. Therefore, for him to—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order. I understand why Mr Muldoon felt motivated to say that. However, it is not dignified to continue to pass reproaches and rebukes across the chamber all morning. We all have a duty to be courteous to one another. From now on, I will rule out of order any member who is deeply disrespectful to other members. That also applies to some of the asides that have been winging their way around.

Bristow Muldoon: I am sure that the Presiding Officer heard many of the remarks of which I was thinking.

My main comments are about why the Parliament exists and what it is delivering. The Parliament already has a strong history of delivery. We have had a strong legislative programme. We have not concentrated on the periphery of what is important to the people of Scotland.

On transport and the environment, we have passed the Transport (Scotland) Act 2001, which, among its many provisions, ensures that local authorities have a stronger role in developing local transport networks. It also provides for free bus

travel for every pensioner—an important measure that will be implemented in October this year. We have also legislated to build a Scottish water industry that is fit to compete and to provide the improved standards of water and environmental protection that Scotland needs.

In areas other than transport and the environment, we have abolished tuition fees and reintroduced student grants in Scotland. Our Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 is a major piece of legislation that improves the rights of homeless people. The First Minister built on that today. The act has also transferred further powers to local authorities to develop housing in their areas.

Those issues are not at the periphery of Scottish politics. They are not unimportant. Anyone who suggests otherwise is running a political agenda in which the people of Scotland are not interested.

The legislative programme with which we go forward includes a water environment and water services bill. That bill, which will be introduced in the summer, will be built on the principles of sustainability and improving the quality of Scotland's water. It is an important bill that is central to the interests of the people of Scotland. The First Minister unveiled a further bill with which the Transport and the Environment Committee will deal: the building bill. That, too, is central to the principle of building a sustainable Scotland in the future.

Tommy Sheridan: Bristow Muldoon has mentioned the Transport and the Environment Committee. Now that Westminster has recognised the folly of lumping transport with other departments, does he agree that it is time that we had a dedicated transport ministry to deal with transport problems in Scotland?

Bristow Muldoon: Ministerial portfolios are not the important thing; the important thing is what we do with the powers that we have. The ways in which we have tried to develop transport policy in Scotland are the right ways. We are promoting public transport to a far greater extent than was ever the case under the Conservatives and we are starting to rebuild Scotland's transport infrastructure.

On resources and what we do with the powers of the Scottish Parliament, I believe that the record of what we have achieved and delivered in the years of the Parliament's existence is strong. We have delivered on the priorities of the Scottish people. There have been record increases in resources to the national health service, contrary to the many misleading stories that some members run around Scotland telling. Transport is receiving extra resources—I hope that it will continue to receive a high profile in the forthcoming spending review and that the

Executive can deliver on the priorities in the transport delivery report.

The priorities of the Executive parties are clear and have regularly been set out by the First Minister: tackling Scotland's poor record on health; improving the way in which our young people are educated; improving Scotland's economy; developing a transport system; and dealing with the problems of crime about which many of our communities are concerned.

Those priorities can be set against the priorities of the main Opposition party, the Scottish National Party: borders, embassies and—according to Mr Andrew Wilson—the question whether we should support England in the world cup. It is no wonder that, in the words of one SNP member, that party is demotivated and confused.

11:02

Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP): It is not often that I quote Jack McConnell but, in the context of this debate, it is highly appropriate that I do. On Tuesday, he identified key areas on which the Government is to act: crime, health and enterprise. He said:

“Their solutions require more than good laws: they need leadership—leadership that is consistent, fair and responsive.”—[*Official Report*, 28 May 2002; c 12131.]

I agree with that, but the Government is offering only legislation. We need good laws, but they are not enough. We should be able to take it for granted that Government is in the business of producing good law. Good law, however, cannot be interpreted as a substitute for good political leadership.

Much of what is in the statement is worthy and needed, and we welcome it. Let us not pretend, however, that it bears the hallmark of a McConnell political leadership. Much of what was announced would have appeared whatever the political hue of the Government of the day. Some proposals will, no doubt, win support from across the chamber. I cite the areas of family law and homelessness. However, the issue of homelessness is not just about law; it is about what we provide. That means targets for new, rented accommodation, for example.

We have a Government that does not want to govern. There have been 37 Sewel motions—laws handed over to London—which is almost as many as the bills that the Scottish Parliament has enacted. We need political leadership to break out of the spiral of decline, to energeise our country, to raise the self-esteem of our people and to tackle the poverty and despair of Scots living in an economy that is not growing at the rate that it should. It is crucial to tackle the core problem of an economic system that is dependent on

someone else somewhere else making the key decisions. That is not just about providing good law; it is about political leadership.

Poverty, the pressures of unemployment and a lack of self-esteem all lead to serious health and mental health problems and an alarming suicide rate among young men in this country. We need to tackle the mental health problems of our country at their root source, but not just by providing the much-needed and worthy law to deal with the consequences of the problem as it arises. That is the core difference between devolution, or administering to problems, and independence, which is about providing solutions to the core problems in the first place.

We need leadership, but that requires political direction and a clear route map of where the Executive is going. All we have had from the McConnell Administration has been a debate in January on the Executive's priority list, which was significant not because of what was in it—everything was in it—but because of what it left out.

We need consistent leadership. Where is the programme for government with the targets and indicators that we have had from previous Administrations? We have a Cabinet team with team-tag membership. On Tuesday, the First Minister mentioned consistency, but what consistency do we get from a Cabinet with such a membership?

Government is about leadership and good public service delivery, which should be at the heart of political leadership. As we have laid out, the SNP would provide leadership in public services by rejecting the privatisation of prisons and hospital services; by embracing the culture of professional and accountable public services that are free from threat and seek only the favour of the public whom they serve; by putting the public at the heart of everything that public services do; by making the delivery of public services as simple and transparent as possible; and by devolving power from Holyrood and urging public services to devolve power, too. We would need laws to define some parts of that—for example, bills to abolish hospital trusts and to provide for our own rail system. The important point is that good law would follow good political leadership that is based on clear values and a clear direction.

I will touch on the legislation that has not been included. Charity law reform is missing. We recognise the importance of people who provide voluntary and charity services—they should be a legislative priority. Where is the bill to provide proportional representation? We should have had political leadership to tackle the imbalance of representation and the complacency and cronyism in many of our councils, but that is missing. The

First Minister said it all in his gaffe in answering John Swinney's questions on PR and taking up good ideas, when he suggested that he would have to decide whether PR was a good idea in the first place. The Liberal Democrats should note that.

We need good law, but this country is crying out for political leadership from its Government. It is crying out for a Government team that energises and liberates our country and our people from dependency. That means independence and the real powers of a real Parliament.

11:07

Iain Smith (North-East Fife) (LD): Today's debate is about delivering on the programme for government, which the Labour party and the Liberal Democrats came together to draw up three years ago. The First Minister was right to reflect on what we have achieved three years into this session, because we have achieved a great deal, including the abolition of feudal tenure, the creation of national parks, the abolition of tuition fees and the introduction of free personal care for the elderly.

There have been major acts on transport, housing and standards in schools. There have been reforms to our public services through the Ethical Standards in Public Life etc (Scotland) Act 2000, the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman Act 2002 and the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Bill. There have also been a number of reforms to our legal system. Those are substantial pieces of legislation that we could not have had without the Scottish Parliament. Indeed, we could not have had them without the Liberal Democrat-Labour partnership Government.

Tommy Sheridan: If people graduated from university before the Scottish Parliament was born, what fees did they pay after graduation? What fees did the member pay?

Iain Smith: Tuition fees have been abolished and we introduced grants. Graduate endowment, as members know, although they might want to mislead the public, exists to support students from poorer backgrounds. I thought that Tommy Sheridan would support that. Those who can afford to pay help those who cannot afford to pay. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Iain Smith: Every student in Scotland is paying less than they would have done before the Education (Graduate Endowment and Student Support) (Scotland) Act 2001 was passed. No student is paying more; every student is paying less.

There is more to be done. I will talk a little about local government, which is my area of interest.

After decades of attacks on local government, particularly from the Tories, who are sitting on my extreme right, we are now seeing a new partnership between local and central Government in Scotland. The Local Government in Scotland Bill will give councils a central role of leadership in the communities. The introduction of community planning, the power of general competence, best value and a prudential system of capital finance will assist local government to play a much more effective leading role in our communities.

It is also essential that the reforms proposed in the white paper "Renewing Local Democracy: The Next Steps" are implemented. The Liberal Democrats have no doubt that the 2003 local elections will be the last under the present system. The Liberal Democrats are about getting things done. We succeeded in abolishing tuition fees and in getting free personal care for the elderly and we will succeed in getting PR for local government.

Those achievements contrast with the position of the SNP. Let us look at the SNP's record. On 22 November, John Swinney said of local elections:

"We could change that system today".

He went on:

"On my election as the First Minister we would usher in immediate legislation to ensure that the local elections in 2003 are held under a new system."—[*Official Report*, 22 November 2001; c 4159-60.]

On 21 November, Tricia Marwick said:

"The Bill is on the table."

I think that it must be under the table, as we have not yet seen it. On 18 December, she urged Liberal Democrat and Labour back benchers to back her member's bill on PR early in the new year. We still have not seen it. Where is the PR bill? Tricia Marwick invited us to back it, but we do not have it.

Tricia Marwick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): Iain Smith will be aware that our proposal for a bill that would introduce the single transferable vote—a Liberal Democrat policy—is on the table. He will also know that, because of the refusal of Liberal Democrat and Labour members to sign up to the bill, the parliamentary authorities have given no support with the drafting. I make a pledge that the bill will be in the system from next week. Will the member back it?

Iain Smith: There was no bill on the table last November and there is still no bill on the table six months later. The SNP does not deliver—that is the truth.

Fiona Hyslop was right to talk about leadership—one can understand why she did, after that miserable speech from her leader. We have seen nothing from the SNP today. The

people of Aberdeen could surely have expected the major Opposition party to come forward with its alternative programme for government. We got nothing from the SNP—it has been a desperate effort.

I conclude by giving members a few ideas of what might have featured in John Swinney's speech, which could explain why the SNP did not produce any proposals. We might have had the blame-it-on-the-parents bill, which Roseanna Cunningham would have introduced, and the don't-blame-it-on-the-parents bill from Mike Russell. From Irene McGugan, we might have had a bill to ban smacking; from Fergus Ewing, we might have had a bill on legalising smacking; and, of course, we might have had Mike Russell's uncertain-about-smacking bill. We might have had a bill in favour of Health Care International nationalisation, which would have been supported by Alex Salmond, and a bill on HCI profiteering from Nicola Sturgeon. We might have had a join-the-euro bill from Andrew Wilson and a don't-join-the-euro bill from Alex Neil. We might also have had a growth-will-look-after-itself (fingers crossed) bill from Andrew Wilson. An old SNP favourite is the jumping-on-bandwagon bill and let us not forget the important free-by-93 bill.

The Labour-Liberal Democrat partnership Government is delivering for Scotland and will continue to deliver for Scotland. We will complete our four-year programme for government in the next year. I welcome the First Minister's statement.

11:13

Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab): The Executive has set out another substantial programme for government, which builds on the achievements of the past three years. I welcome the proposals for protecting our children and for seriously tackling homelessness to ensure that a decent, secure home is a right for everyone. I also welcome the improvements for those who suffer from mental health problems and the commitment to improving educational provision for children with additional support needs. I welcome in particular the commitment to tackling the pervasiveness of pornography in our society, which, I believe, underpins gender discrimination.

I congratulate the Executive on its continuing commitment to equal opportunities and on its mainstreaming policy, which ensures that equality is at the heart of the Scottish Parliament's policy making, legislation, budgets and delivery of service, as the First Minister highlighted in his statement.

Examples of the Executive's commitment to

engaging with women and to tackling gender discrimination include the women in Scotland consultative forum, which is a twice-yearly focal point for consultation between the Scottish Executive and women's groups, and Engender women's budget group, which consists of a wide range of partners and is a member of the Scottish Executive's advisory group on equality and budgets.

Some Executive policies that impact on women have already been introduced. They include the child care strategy, the domestic abuse prevention strategy, one-stop breast cancer clinics, the national information technology cervical screening programme, a commitment to rolling out Zero Tolerance's respect education programme across Scotland and better protection and dignity for victims of sexual crime.

I am pleased by the Executive's commitment to ensure that equality remains at the heart of government and is developed through the mainstreaming strategy. Our equal opportunities mainstreaming policy is something that we should shout about. Too often, we fail to get across to people what the Parliament is achieving. We need to be positive about our achievements.

I am also pleased that, here in Aberdeen, the Equal Opportunities Committee yesterday held a lunch and civic participation event on mainstreaming. The committee is currently undertaking a gender inquiry into best value in local government, the results of which, when they are published, I hope the Executive will welcome.

However, everything in the garden is not rosy. Scotland is still the sick man—or woman—of Europe. There are still problems of poverty, homelessness and alienation among sections of Scottish society. The Executive must continue to prioritise the inclusion of all our people so that everyone feels that they have a contribution to make. People must feel that participating in society and exercising their democratic rights are worth while.

Although I welcome the Executive's commitment to transforming local government, I point out that we still have a long way to go before we achieve gender equality in public service. In particular, we need to tackle the under-representation of women among councillors. Although the Executive has made huge inroads in overcoming years of underfunding of local government, there is still a need for better resourcing. If we really want equal opportunities to be mainstreamed at local government level as well as at national Government level, we must be willing to provide the extra resources that are required.

I make a plea to the Executive and to the Parliament to ensure that, before any of their

contracts are decided on and awarded, those contracts include equality requirements. I hope that the Executive will encourage local authorities to do the same.

Finally, I have a long wish list of bills that I would like the Scottish Parliament to pass. In particular, I want to see a bill to ensure that, no matter where she might be, a woman has the right to breast-feed her baby. That would tie in with the strategy to tackle child poverty and improve children's health as part of a whole package. Since the members' debate that I secured last year, I have been working on a proposal for a bill that would make it illegal for anyone to stop a woman breast-feeding her baby. If we are to take children's health and the rights of children and mothers seriously, we should support such a bill. I hope that the Executive will welcome my outline proposal just as I have welcomed the programme for government that the Executive has outlined today.

11:17

Michael Russell (South of Scotland) (SNP):

Let me first of all welcome the important proposal for children's legislation that the First Minister outlined. However, I hope that, when the Deputy First Minister sums up, he will indicate how the Executive plans to allocate resources to tackle the crisis in child social work. The bill cannot work unless there is a sufficient number of child social workers, which there is not. As my friend Irene McGugan has pointed out again and again, there is now a grave recruitment crisis in social work. Without sufficient resourcing, the bill will not work. I suspect that much of the legislation in the programme will not work because the mechanisms to put the legislation into practice have simply not been resourced.

Presiding Officer, you and I are old enough—as are others, I am sure—to remember watching the men on the Kremlin wall at events during the Soviet Union's annual celebrations. There grew up a whole industry of people who could tell who was in and who was out just by looking at the photographs. In fact, the entire history of the Soviet Union can now be analysed by examining the extent to which the photographs were doctored. That is what is done in an excellent book, "The Commissar Vanishes".

Having decided to apply that technique to the Scottish Executive, I got hold of "Working together for Scotland: A Programme for Government". Indeed, how the ministers have vanished. Look at the sad picture of the Scottish Cabinet: Wendy Alexander, gone; Henry McLeish, gone; Sarah Boyack, gone; Angus MacKay, gone; Susan Deacon, gone; Jackie Baillie [MEMBERS: "Gone."]; Tom McCabe [MEMBERS: "Gone."]—gone, but not

forgotten, of course.

Only one Labour person in the picture has survived and he has survived in various incarnations. We saw why in his statement today. He is an arch-juggler and manipulator; he can make something out of virtually nothing. That is what he did today. However, there is a problem with that, because without vision there can be no progress, and Mr McConnell's statement was completely without vision.

Ian Jenkins (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): Will the member give way?

Michael Russell: No. I am talking about the leader of Mr Jenkins's coalition, so it is important that he listen. That leader is a man whom even Mr Jenkins is prepared to follow to the barricades. That is an unlikely idea, I know, but there we are.

There was no vision, particularly on education and culture. I want to address both those issues. There was an announcement of possible legislation on special educational needs—the words were that the Executive was “developing proposals”. The Education, Culture and Sport Committee considered that issue more than two years ago. There has been consultation, the results of which the Executive has had for six months. However, only now is the Executive “developing proposals”. That does not show much urgency.

The Minister for Education and Young People (Cathy Jamieson): Will the member give way?

Michael Russell: No, I am sorry, I have only four minutes. I am interested in action, not words. I will not give way.

We need to consider what else has to be done in education. A vast range of things has to be done. On discipline in schools and on the rights and responsibilities of young people, we have heard nothing at all; on the five-to-14 action plan, nothing at all; on class sizes, nothing at all; and on teacher training—which has to be sorted out—nothing at all. In fact, there is no vision on education whatever. Education, education, education has become nothing, nothing, nothing.

There is also a huge problem in culture. Incredibly, the statement that we heard today was the fourth occasion on which no announcement has been made on any legislation relating to culture in Scotland. From the start right through to the end of the parliamentary session, the Parliament will have considered not one piece of legislation on culture. Many people who spent years campaigning for this Parliament because they thought that it would make a difference to the culture and values of Scotland are bitterly disappointed in the lack of action. There are whole areas that require action—including the outmoded

national institutions and the outmoded and creaking bureaucracy of culture—but nothing has been done.

Most important of all is Gaelic. Last week, the ministerial advisory group reported. It criticised the paralysis of consultation since 1999 and it called for urgent action. Its number 1 recommendation was for a secure-status bill for Gaelic—something that the Labour party promised in 1999. However, the word “Gaelic” did not appear in Mr McConnell's statement—not a mention of it.

Mr Iain Smith, who fortunately has left the chamber, talked about not getting Tricia Marwick's bill. Tricia Marwick and I face the same difficulty: the Parliament has inadequate resources for drafting members' bills. However, the non-Executive bills unit is drafting a bill on Gaelic. If the Executive wants to take that bill on, it may—I am not precious about it. Mr McConnell promised that there was a new way of doing things. I say to him today that, if he is committed to Gaelic, let him offer to take on the bill to give the language secure status. In that way, we would at least have one bill in the first four years of the first Scottish Parliament in 300 years that dealt with the precious aspects of our culture.

11:23

Mr Keith Harding (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): As my party's local government spokesman, I will concentrate on two things in the Executive's programme. The first is the Local Government in Scotland Bill, which appears only to be an excuse for inaction and yet another example of the Executive and the Parliament making work for its own sake. The bill proposes: a statutory duty of best value, a system that is already entrenched in local government circles; a statutory footing for community planning, which councils already undertake but which should be a matter for local variation and not national direction; and a power of well-being—a watered down power of general competence—which no one has yet shown to be necessary: indeed, no one has shown what it might be used for.

The bill is of purely ornamental value. It is designed to make the Executive look good, but it serves no real practical purpose. I suppose that I can welcome the tagged-on measure to allow council meeting calling notices to be circulated by e-mail. That is a truly staggering achievement, of which the minister concerned must be very proud.

The second thing that I will concentrate on is the white paper on renewing local democracy. Unfortunately, four years after Neil McIntosh was asked to investigate local government reform, the white paper is all about keeping the coalition together. It does nothing to promote local

democracy and accountability or to loosen the minister's ever-tightening grip on our councils.

The Executive is now embarking on yet another consultation, having already financed two costly independent reports. That reinforces the view that Labour is taking its Lib Dem lackeys for a ride, promising proportional representation tomorrow, while simultaneously buying off its cronies in Scotland's councils with pledges of higher pay. If ministers wish to increase councillors' pay, they should reduce the number of councillors and make the move self-financing by cutting and redistributing the so-called responsibility allowances, which have proliferated.

Brian Adam (North-East Scotland) (SNP): I take it that the Conservatives have had a change of heart over PR. Will they now support at least the principle of PR for local government?

Mr Harding: I am just coming to that subject. There is no question of what we want—we want first past the post.

I have real concerns about relaxing the constraints on council employees becoming councillors, given the recent events relating to the Third Age Group in Fife. Introducing PR at council level will simply entrench power in the hands of a few politicians and institutionalise a kind of proportional cronyism that flies in the face of the stated wish to improve local democracy. Proportional cronyism has seen Lib Dem cronies as well as Labour ones added to quangos since the Liberal Democrats took a share in power. PR would do nothing to sever the links between the vested interests of councillors and the organisations that they grant fund.

Improving local democracy requires a fundamental change that only the Scottish Tories espouse. We want a shift in power from politicians and the institutions of the state back to the independent and autonomous institutions of civil society. Power should be in the hands of individuals, families and local communities. We want community councils to take on greater responsibility.

Mr Rumbles: Will the member give way?

Mr Harding: No, thank you. I have heard the member speak too often.

Where possible, community councils should be given control of common-good funds. The Executive is not committed to decentralisation and giving more autonomy to councils. Its proposals are all about controlling and directing. The Executive's programme for local government will do little to address the ever-declining core services that are provided to council tax payers. Under the Labour-Liberal Democratic coalition—

Mr Rumbles: Democratic?

Mr Harding: No, that is one thing that the Liberals are not.

The council tax payers pay ever more while receiving less. The council tax has become yet another stealth tax. I relish the forthcoming local government elections and the inevitable return of Conservative-controlled councils in Scotland.

11:27

Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP): I am sure that I was not the only member to have the pleasure of watching the BBC news before 7 am this morning, when the caption under the picture of the First Minister read:

"Daphne Mackie, Burntisland Jubilee Party Organiser".

It might as well have been true. The sad reality is that today the First Minister has given us nothing tangible to tackle the real problems facing the ordinary citizens of Scotland. If I had been given the opportunity to ask a factual question earlier—I hope that the Deputy First Minister will take up this point when he sums up—I would have asked what target the Executive is setting in relation to child poverty.

The Executive was elected in May 1999 and inherited a level of child poverty of 30 per cent—300,000 children live in poverty in one of the potentially richest nations in the world. Today, after three years of the Scottish Executive, 30 per cent of our children live in poverty—300,000 children still live in poverty. How many children will be lifted out of poverty by next May, the end of the Administration's first full term? If the Executive is not prepared to set a target for the reduction of child poverty, it should not be in Government in the first place. A party should be in Government to tackle issues such as child poverty.

Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab): How many of Tommy Sheridan's constituents have been delighted by the chancellor's innovations such as the working families tax credit, which has made a difference of £200 per month to single parents—young, poverty-stricken people—in my constituency? There were not just one or two of them; hundreds of them were delighted at that measure. The statistics will take time to feed through the system. Does Tommy Sheridan accept that or does he still say that the measure makes no difference?

Tommy Sheridan: If Helen Eadie was honest with herself, she would accept that the working families tax credit is a farce. Tens of thousands of families who were already in the poverty trap are worse off because their income has been reduced by 80 pence in the pound. Where their income has increased, there has been a reduction in housing benefit and council tax rebates, so that their

disposable income hardly changes. That is the experience of thousands of families and it is one of the reasons why I am disappointed that the First Minister did not announce that the Executive will support the School Meals (Scotland) Bill, which proposes free school meals for the children of Scotland. When we took evidence on the bill, we spoke to parents who had been encouraged to get jobs. They had taken up low-paid jobs, only to find that they lost benefits to which they were formerly entitled, one of which was the entitlement to free school meals. They now have less disposable income than they did before they took up employment. That is the problem with the working families tax credit: it does not tackle poverty, it maintains poverty.

Brian Fitzpatrick (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab): Will Mr Sheridan explain the logic in requiring parents in my constituency, who neither need nor want public help to feed their children, to take up free school meals, instead of providing help for parents in constituencies such as the one in which I grew up, who do need and want public help for their children?

Tommy Sheridan: Brian Fitzpatrick has just displayed political illiteracy. There are 123,000 children who live in poor families and are denied free school meals. The bill would include those children. The right to a free, healthy, nutritious school meal, with milk and water, would provide the parents of the children in Brian Fitzpatrick's constituency with a route to tackling the obesity that is now the major cause of premature death across Scotland because of its links—

Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): Will the member give way?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: He is in the last minute of his speech.

Tommy Sheridan: I will take the member's intervention.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: In that case, you will have 30 seconds left to speak.

Johann Lamont: I would be grateful if my colleague could explain how he would make my daughter eat a healthy, nutritious meal. The problem is not the cost. The bigger issue is nutrition, and making meals free will not make a difference. The proposal will export money out of my constituency into constituencies that do not require help with free meals but which do require help with healthy eating.

Tommy Sheridan: It would help if the debate was honest. It would be a rational—[*Interruption.*] The Labour members are behaving like children—the crèche is outside.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order. Please close, Mr Sheridan.

Tommy Sheridan: It would be a rational debate if the member had said that there would be difficulty in getting children to eat healthy meals. That is a fact of life; there is no doubt about that. However, it is wrong to add that children will not eat healthy meals. It is a challenge and, unlike Johann Lamont, I want to do something about the problem instead of continually talking about it. That is why the First Minister, if he is serious about tackling child poverty and the poor dietary and health record of this country, should have mentioned that anti-poverty, pro-health issue instead of just talking a good game.

11:34

Mr John McAllion (Dundee East) (Lab): Given the earlier admonition from the chair, I begin by assuring the Parliament that, during John Swinney's speech, I for one was not honking like a monkey in a barrel of cider—a wonderful phrase from Andrew Wilson. However, I admit that after 15 years of listening to parliamentary debate, I sometimes wish that I was that happy monkey, rather than having to listen to the turgid stuff we sometimes hear in Parliament.

I begin by welcoming the part of the Executive programme that offers a protection of children bill. I particularly welcome Jim Wallace's offer to meet me to discuss my member's bill, which would offer protection to child witnesses by ensuring that the cases in which they are involved have to come to trial within a specified time scale. In the new spirit of the Executive working with members on their legislation, I look forward to Executive support for the bill, which unfortunately so far has not been forthcoming.

I also welcome the announcement of a mental health bill. It is excellent to see at last concrete evidence of the claim that has been made for a long time that mental health is one of the top three clinical priorities for the national health service. In saying that, I make a plea to the Executive to take urgent non-legislative action in relation to the ongoing crisis in forensic psychiatry.

Almost every member of the Parliament is aware of patients in the state hospital at Carstairs who are ready to move on but who are trapped because of the absence of places in medium-secure units such as the one at Moray royal hospital in Perth. They will be aware that there are patients in medium-secure units who are ready to move on but who are trapped because there are no places in the community for them to move on to. They will also be aware that there are no places in the community for them to move on to because local authorities are cash strapped and do not have the money to provide the required places. Unless there is financial action by the Executive behind the legislative action, the

situation will not be good enough. I hope that the Executive takes that message on board in a big way.

I welcome the commitment, such as it was, to make progress on PR for local government. PR is one of the issues on which the First Minister and I are fellow travellers, although I suspect that I am more comfortable with that than he is. Like him, I understand the barriers that exist not just on the Labour back benches but in the wider Labour party to making any progress on proportional representation, but those barriers will be overcome only if we have an open and honest debate about PR. I look forward to taking part in that debate when Tricia Marwick's member's bill comes before the Parliament. I look forward not just to debating it but to voting on it before the next general election, because it is time that closet PR supporters—wherever they may be—came out and declared themselves, in particular those in the Labour party.

I hope that when the debate takes place we will acknowledge the virtual political earthquake that has taken place across western democracies since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the cold war. The 21st century political landscape is completely different from that of the 20th century. In the 20th century we had a two-party system with a big party of the left, which was committed to the overthrow of capitalism and its replacement with socialism, and a big party of the right, which supported capitalism.

That situation has been overtaken, so that now we have four mainstream parties that support capitalism, a smaller socialist party, a smaller green party and other small parties that have grown up around all kinds of issues. Electoral reform—proportional representation—reflects the new political realities of the 21st century in a way that the first-past-the-post system never can. I hope that the debate takes place at that level, rather than at the level of arguing about which party will suffer from PR.

The Executive programme tells us a lot about the place of this Parliament in the wider political settlement of what we might call Britain in Europe. Are we a Parliament that is prepared to take risks and to do things that do not sit easily with the people who run things from the sovereign Parliament in Westminster, or are we not? That is the question.

This is a programme of worthy legislation with which almost nobody in the Parliament will disagree, but this Parliament is at its best when it takes risks and tries to capture the imagination of the Scottish people, as we did with free personal care for the elderly, and as I hope we will do with free school meals for every school pupil in Scotland. A health time bomb is ticking away in

this country. Only this morning we heard on the news that by 2030, half of all adults will be obese. If we do nothing about that, we will be in danger of letting the Scottish people down. The thing to do is to change policy direction in a dramatic way. Let us have free school meals for all pupils in Scotland. That will send out a clear message.

11:38

Mr Duncan Hamilton (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I associate myself with the remarks at the end of John McAllion's speech.

I wish to go back to 1997 and one of Tony Blair's more memorable and destructive contributions to devolution, when he dismissed the Scottish Parliament as a parish council—we should remember that we are talking about a national Parliament. I ask members, when they examine the proposed bills and the programme for government, to reflect on whether they are worthy of a national Parliament.

To my mind, a national Parliament exists to set strategic goals. It is about innovation and creativity. It is about doing big things, seeing the bigger picture and painting for the people of Scotland a picture of the world in which they could live—the possible Scotland. That is not what we have before us. We have worthy pieces of legislation, which will get my support and that of my party, but we do not have a picture of where Scotland could be. That is important. Everyone in politics seeks the vision thing and I suggest that the programme does not show such vision.

Equally, the philosophy that lies behind the programme is unclear. Does any thematic approach prevail? What are the Government's views? Does the Executive believe in bigger government or smaller government? Does it believe in intervention? Should not we have an idea of its philosophy? That is important, because all that we have had is the suggestion that we should "do less, better". The programme certainly does less. I leave it to members to judge whether it does anything better.

Another option has been expressed by two First Ministers in a most inelegant phrase—cut the crap. That is not a philosophy, but a statement of the obvious. Of course the Government should do that, but that is neither a reason for the Parliament's creation nor a reason for what we do. A vacuum is not being filled. The Parliament has a long way to go in selling itself to the people of Scotland and we had better start soon to paint the picture of a better Scotland.

Today's announcement on PR was farcical. The McIntosh report, which was published in 1999, involved extensive consultation, the length and breadth of the country. Every organisation, council

and individual was given an opportunity to contribute and the McIntosh commission made a recommendation. After that, in April 2000, the Kerley report recommended STV. We then had another consultation. A working party on local democracy was established to boot the matter into the long grass and it reported in 2001. Another consultation was held in November 2001, and now some members have the cheek to suggest that Tricia Marwick's bill will not be properly drafted. The reason for those comments is that none of the members who claim to support PR took the time and effort to sign the bill so that it could be properly drafted.

When Iain Smith was given the opportunity today to make clear his commitment to signing the bill, he did not take it. Why? Is he scared of his masters rapping his knuckles? I do not know. If he genuinely believes in PR, he should say so.

Iain Smith: Will the member give way?

Mr Hamilton: The member has just re-entered the chamber. That is rude, so no thanks.

Today, the First Minister gave us a paragraph on PR. He said:

"We have given a firm commitment"—

at long last—

"which I restate today—that we will consider the responses to the consultation."

Gee, thanks. What would be the point in the Executive's holding a consultation if it did not consider the responses? Of course ministers should consider the responses. That is hardly progress.

The First Minister also said:

"After the summer recess, we will set out our legislative intentions on the future governance of local authorities."

I do not doubt that that will involve yet another consultation. When will the Liberal Democrats realise that Labour is pulling their chain? Labour is taking the mickey. When will the penny drop? Labour will not give the Liberal Democrats PR before 2003. At the heart of the Labour establishment, there is no intention to give up what Labour believes it rightfully owns—the fiefdoms in central Scotland. To put it in cynical political terms, why would it give them up? Naively, Liberal Democrats think that progress will be made, when everyone knows that it will not be.

The programme is not visionary; it is simply another relaunch. After three years of the Parliament, the coalition is already running out of good ideas. I want more vision and more commitment to a possible Scotland and to something bigger than hedges and dog dirt.

11:43

Ben Wallace (North-East Scotland) (Con): As an MSP for North-East Scotland, I associate myself with Nicol Stephen's remarks. I thank the people of Aberdeen and the north-east for giving us a good welcome and supporting the Parliament up here. They deserve our thanks. I have enjoyed the experience. For some of us, it is unfortunate that we must return to Auld Reekie next week.

The First Minister talked about how the work goes on. Work certainly continues on health care. The Conservatives will fully support the introduction of the mental health bill. That is a good proposal that has arisen from the Millan report. It will go some way towards helping our mental health services and dealing with the problems that they face.

We look forward to the bill that will follow the health reform white paper that was announced today. We are not sure when that bill will be introduced. I ask the Deputy First Minister to acknowledge that the Health and Community Care Committee has not yet received the mental health bill, which it will scrutinise in the autumn. Time is running out for this session—I think that the committee has about 20 weekly meetings left between now and the election. Is that ample time for proper consultation on, and parliamentary scrutiny of, proposals for a new reform bill—especially one that has not been trailed in the past few months and that does not have much of a strong basis?

When the bill is introduced, if it gives financial control to practices, local health care co-operatives, general practitioners or primary care teams and if it allows them to commission or purchase services on behalf of their patients, the Conservatives will remind the First Minister and his Executive that that is in line with the recommendations that were produced by Griffiths back in the early 1980s. Ministers may say that that is not fundholding, but it will be fundholding.

When Malcolm Chisholm was last asked the question, he said that the reason why it was not called fundholding was because the contracts would be electronic rather than paper based. However, if the primary care sector is given fiscal control and freedom to commission care for patients, it is the same thing—it is fundholding.

If that decision is taken, it will be a sharp recognition by the Executive that it has spent millions of pounds vandalising a system only to put it back with the addition of a few changed new Labour words. We will not be fooled. We invented the system and we know why it is there and what it is there to deliver.

It is interesting to note what the First Minister did not say about health in his statement. How will the

Executive deal with the numerous failed manifesto pledges that date back to 1997? The First Minister's statement did not address how the Executive will deal with Labour's 1997 pledge to abolish mixed-sex wards. The statement did not include the new patient's charter, which the Executive and the Labour party have promised since 1997. It failed to announce the delivery of the dedicated minister for public health that was promised in 1997. It failed to deliver a ban on tobacco advertising, failed to cut waiting lists and failed to cut waiting times.

Today, quarterly figures were announced for acute health activity. I noticed that some Labour members outside the chamber were trying to trail the fact that the figures are a great victory as Labour has cut waiting lists. It has not done so. If one compares the figures from when Labour came into office with today's figures, one sees that fewer patients are being treated. People may wait less time, but members will remember that the Scottish Executive decided that it did not want to talk about waiting lists but would move on waiting times. The result is that fewer people are being treated.

The same number of people are waiting now as were waiting in 1999, but fewer people are being treated. What has gone up is the deferred waiting list—the black hole of waiting lists—by 7,000. The Executive is treating fewer people, but somehow waiting lists have come down by a little bit. That does not say much other than that the people who are on the deferred waiting list cannot get an appointment. They turn up at hospital only to find that it is dirty and have to be sent home. Then they disappear into a black hole.

We will not be fooled by the latest Scottish Executive press release that is probably winging its way around. The work will go on and the Conservatives will ensure that we are the ones who are pushing the agenda to empower patients and front-line staff to make the decisions that will ensure that choice and diversity are delivered in health care. We will do that for the sake of the patient and not for the sake of ideology.

11:48

Mr Alasdair Morrison (Western Isles) (Lab): A month ago, the First Minister visited my constituency for two days. As part of that 48-hour flurry, he arrived on Benbecula one morning to open a brand-new hospital on the island. He then went across the island to open an office complex that has been built to accommodate civil servants who have been dispersed from Highlands and Islands Enterprise's Inverness offices. After that, he moved northwards to open a junior secondary school on the island of Lewis. Before he departed for the Orkney islands, he opened a brand-new airport terminal in Stornaway. The visit is tangible

evidence of the investment that has been put in place since 1997. It is a programme of investment and change that has accelerated since 1999.

During the time that the First Minister spent in the Western Isles, he met a great number of people, many of whom reinforced the importance of land reform legislation. Many people highlighted the fact that Scotland's devolved Parliament is going about the business of dismantling the ludicrous system of land ownership that exists in Scotland. Land reform has been an aspiration since the days of Keir Hardie. As an islander and a highlander, it is a privilege to be part of the generation of Labour politicians that is helping to deliver that reform.

Land reform is legislation that empowers communities. It puts citizens at the heart of the decision making that affects communities' lives. I welcome the announcement of a white paper on crofting reform. It demonstrates once more that the Administration appreciates the importance of crofting to the environment and to the social and economic well-being of the Highlands and Islands.

The Highlands is a dynamic region. I instruct those who may not be as familiar with the Highlands as I am to pay attention to those of us who choose to represent the Highlands in a positive way. They should not listen to the girning and carping of members who have been elected to represent the region but choose not to live there. That important distinction should be pointed out.

For the past three years, the Executive has been spending sensibly the £200 million of European transitional funding that the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer secured for the region in 1999. That money is being used to meet our priorities right across the Highlands and Islands.

Earlier, I mentioned the dispersal of jobs. Although that does not require legislation, it needs an attitudinal change. Indeed, such a change has taken place since 1999. Civil service jobs should and must be dispersed across Scotland, as that will help to reinforce the First Minister's comment this morning that the Parliament is for all parts of Scotland.

I certainly welcome the measures on homelessness, child protection and mental health that have been announced. Of course, everything that the Labour-led Executive does is underpinned by its awareness of social justice. Defending the underdog and the vulnerable matters as much to the people in my island constituency as it does to the constituents of the Glasgow Baillieston MSP and Minister for Social Justice, Margaret Curran. I am delighted by her confirmation last night that she intends to visit my constituency, which she gave in her usual gracious way.

I want to assist Mr John Swinney, because I know that this morning has been difficult for him. He failed to mention the bills that would be a priority for a nationalist Administration such as the divorce from Northern Ireland, Wales and England bill; the issuing passports to visit relatives in England bill; the debt and borrowing to cover our £4 billion fiscal deficit bill; the closing schools and hospitals because the oil price has fallen bill; the reducing education to finance embassies bill; the printing currency without consequences bill; the neverendum bill; the correct colour of the saltire bill; and the which flag and where to fly it bill.

Andrew Wilson: Will the member give way?

Mr Morrison: I am in my final minute.

While the Executive gets on with the priorities of empowering communities, legislating to protect our young people and improving the lives of our elderly, the nationalists can get on with the festering, girning and whingeing they excel at.

I commend the programme of government to the chamber and urge all members to support it.

11:52

George Lyon (Argyll and Bute) (LD): To begin with, I welcome the First Minister's announcement of the title conditions bill and the agricultural holdings bill, both of which complete the land reform agenda that the coalition Government has been pursuing over the past three years.

I will deal first with the agricultural holdings bill. In his speech, Murdo Fraser made a number of allegations and tried to suggest that I was unfit to argue the case for the bill because I had some sort of vested interest in the matter. As the agricultural holdings bill clearly attempts to shift the balance of power from the landlords back to the tenant farmers, many in the farming community welcome it. Mr Fraser tried to argue that the pre-emptive right to buy would cause tenancies to disappear. That is complete and utter nonsense. It is a great pity that he is not in the chamber, because he might actually learn something about farming.

If Murdo Fraser knew the first thing about the current farming scene—and about the rented sector, in particular—he would know that almost no tenancies have been offered to tenants over the past 10 to 12 years. Instead, tenant farmers have been offered partnership agreements, which are legal constructions put together by land agents and landlords to strip away tenants' rights under the Agricultural Holdings (Scotland) Act 1991. A tenant farmer who signs a partnership agreement with a landlord can be turfed out the next day with no notice or compensation whatsoever.

Worse than that, land agents have been coercing tenants into giving up secure tenancies

and entering into partnership agreements, usually in return for some small financial compensation. In reality, those tenants are being stripped of every right under the 1991 act or the Agricultural Holdings (Scotland) Act 1949. I make no apology for campaigning to end that abuse of the landlord-tenant system and to end the hated feudal system in Scotland. Indeed, it is a campaign that I intend to continue.

We have had a wide-ranging debate this morning, and we have heard a plea from Andrew Wilson to enter into a proper debate on the future of Scotland. Andrew is quite right to ask for that. Over the past three years, the coalition has put forward its priorities, its spending plans to back up those priorities and its legislative programme. What have we heard in that time from the SNP about those serious matters? Absolutely nothing. We have heard no priorities, no budget alternative and certainly no alternative legislative programme.

Andrew Wilson quite rightly suggested that the debate should be about the future of Scotland and its vision, but the SNP's position seems to be full of contradictions. He quite rightly argued—as he is entitled to do—for the Irish model of low tax, an enterprise agenda and low public-sector spending. At 33 per cent of gross domestic product, Ireland has one of the lowest rates of public spending in Europe. Andrew Wilson argued for that position, but time after time front-bench spokesmen for the SNP, such as Kenny MacAskill and Alex Neil, commit the SNP to higher and ever greater public spending. Indeed, the SNP leader, John Swinney, restated his party's position on the PFI—that the SNP would not use private finance to fund any capital investment projects in Scotland. I am sorry, but if he rules out the PFI, that means higher public-sector spending, because there is no other way to finance capital investment. Again, he has committed himself to higher public-sector spending.

How on earth can we take the SNP seriously in a debate about the future of Scotland when there are contradictions coming from its spokesmen?

Andrew Wilson: I welcome George Lyon's praise for my contribution, but I do not recognise what he says I said. Ireland's economy is growing 10 times faster than Scotland's is at present. Does he accept that the money will not be there for investment if the economy does not grow, and that that should be the number 1 issue for this Parliament's attention?

George Lyon: As Andrew Wilson well knows after the time he spent in Ireland, one of the key reasons for the expansion of the Irish economy is the social partnership agreement between business, the unions and Government to lower the overall burden of taxation over time to allow the economy to grow. That is the key driver in the Irish

economy. I do not see how one member of the SNP can argue for that position when its other front-bench spokesmen are arguing for the Scandinavian model of much greater public spending and much greater public-sector investment from the public purse. The SNP cannot have it both ways.

I wind up by adding to the list that my colleague Alasdair Morrison gave for the SNP's alternative legislative programme. He missed one bill out—the fast-track-back-to-Scotland bill, sponsored by Alex Salmond.

Over the past three years, the Liberal-Labour Government has delivered a substantive programme for government that will make a difference to every Scot's everyday life. The Liberal Democrats have played a major role in ensuring the success of Scotland's first Government, and we remain committed to ensuring that the success of the coalition is enhanced and delivered over the next 11 months.

11:58

Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West): Our Parliament recently celebrated its third birthday. Some critics might say that there is not much to celebrate, but today's debate certainly gives us the opportunity to reflect on what the Scottish Executive and the Scottish Parliament have been doing over the past three years and where we go from here.

It is worth recalling the mood of optimism and national euphoria that existed in Scotland in May 1999, when the Parliament came into existence—the first Scottish Parliament for nearly 300 years and the first ever democratically elected Scottish Parliament. There were great hopes and great expectations on the part of the people of Scotland, but that mood of optimism and national euphoria has been replaced by a somewhat more realistic attitude. Some might go so far as to say that it has been replaced by cynicism.

Some cynics go so far as to say that the Scottish Parliament has done nothing at all for the people of Scotland, but I profoundly disagree with them. Admittedly, there have been disappointments. The Parliament could and should do more, but there have been some notable achievements. For example, financial support for students was mentioned. That support is far from perfect—the Executive did not even fully implement the Cubie proposals—but at least it is substantially better than the deal that was introduced by Blair's Government, which still applies to students south of the border. The Parliament has ensured a fairer deal on free care for the elderly, which will be implemented on 1 July. In addition, I wish the Executive well in the joint bid with Ireland to host

the Euro 2008 football championships. Hosting the championships would greatly benefit not just sport, but the economies of Scotland and Ireland.

However, much more needs to be done to develop the Scottish economy and improve employment prospects for the people whom we represent. I was disappointed that the First Minister did not put more emphasis on the economy and jobs. In the Falkirk area, for example, unemployment is well above the national average and redundancies have recently been announced at BP, Exabyte Scotland Ltd and Dyson Refractories Ltd.

Recently, Scottish Enterprise Forth Valley and Falkirk Council drew up a Falkirk action plan to develop and diversify the local economy. The plan would help to create up to 4,000 jobs over three years, but would require an initial pump-priming investment of between £15 million and £20 million. In turn, that would help to attract additional investment of up to £200 million. However, the Executive has so far failed to provide or commit an additional penny of investment. I appeal to it and to the Minister for Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning, Iain Gray, to come up with the money. It would be an investment in jobs and people and would demonstrate that the Scottish Executive and the Scottish Parliament are helping to build a better future for our people.

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

12:02

Brian Fitzpatrick (Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Lab): The first anniversary of my election to the Parliament as the Labour member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden is approaching and it is an honour to speak for the Labour party at the close of this debate. Like the First Minister, I recognise that work goes on and that there is more to do.

Our colleague Nicol Stephen rightly mentioned the warm welcome that we visitors have received in the north-east. Our colleagues Lewis Macdonald and Elaine Thomson, and partnership colleagues, make the case for the north-east and for an Executive that delivers for all Scotland's people. I hope that all of us will join them in thanking our hosts in Aberdeen. *[Applause.]*

In the spirit of consensus and the new politics, I hoped to say that Mr Swinney made an interesting contribution to the debate. Members will have noticed that when Mr Swinney refused an intervention from Phil Gallie—which is difficult to do—he remarked that he was running short of time. Truer words have never been said. His contribution was half-hearted.

Tommy Sheridan: Will the member give way?

Brian Fitzpatrick: Shortly. Perhaps the anticipation of that contribution explains the absence of nearly half of his parliamentary party from the chamber and Alex Salmond's reappearance outside the chamber.

Mr Swinney spoke about youth crime.

Tommy Sheridan: On running out of time, what target will Brian Fitzpatrick, as a member of the Labour party, accept from the Executive in respect of reducing child poverty? That party's figures show that 300,000 kids were in poverty when the party came into power and that 300,000 kids are still in poverty. How many kids will be in poverty next year?

Brian Fitzpatrick: As Mr Sheridan knows, but chooses not to share with the chamber, levels of child poverty are falling. Complex issues require multiple actions to address them. The one way in which we will never eliminate child poverty in Scotland is by a desperate attempt to recreate the economic and social circumstances of the Soviet Union in 1924, as proposed by Tommy Sheridan and his allies.

Tommy Sheridan: Ignore the children.

Brian Fitzpatrick: Tommy Sheridan didnae like that.

If we can return to Mr Swinney's comments on youth crime, members will remember the remarks made by his colleagues in the chamber, who described public concern on the issue as a press bogey. Thankfully, Mr Swinney now seems to recognise that it is no press bogey. I welcome the fact that there is acceptance of public concern on the issue and that actions are proposed. The concerns are as common to the people of Pollok as they are to the people of Strathkelvin and Bearsden and to people and communities throughout Scotland.

I welcome the statement on the work on youth crime. I look forward to working with colleagues, including the Deputy First Minister and Minister for Justice, and the Deputy Minister for Justice, on that, and on the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Bill. We will have energetic discussions on the detail and direction of the bill, but I hope that members will unite around our proposals to put victims at the heart of our criminal justice system. Our proposals strengthen protection for victims of stalking and harassment. Parents and grandparents throughout Scotland, and all who care for Scotland's children, will welcome action against those who hold and distribute pornography.

David McLetchie has left us, but before departing he delivered a speech, in a very deep voice, which did not disguise the paucity of the standard Tory speech. The Tory party is now a rump of landowners and farmers, which is

speaking yet again for its core concerns: private hospitals; one primary school; and landowners' interests. The Tories have not proffered a shadow budget or any shadow legislative programme. On the third anniversary of the Parliament, the Conservatives have no proposals and have nothing to say.

We know about the investment that we are delivering for the NHS in Scotland: Gordon Brown's budget booster for the NHS in Scotland means that we have maximum investment. The announcements today also deliver maximum benefit. The First Minister reminds us that we are proud of our NHS. In Scotland, we need to be proud of our health service and deliver on public health and health service reform.

Alasdair Morrison reminded us of our party's historic commitment to land reform. That commitment is shared in Scotland by nearly all parties and by those of no party. We will have discussion, sometimes very active discussion, on the detail of the bill, but I welcome the progress that is being made. We know from where the opposition will come. It will come from the same folk who, for the same reasons, will oppose the proposed agricultural holdings legislation.

I commend to the chamber a legislative programme that delivers for the people of Scotland. It is my honour to do so.

12:08

Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con): This morning's statement was tangible evidence of the First Minister's declared intent to do less, but few will have any confidence that he will do it better.

The First Minister's offering was cold kail; a reheated, but lukewarm potpourri of stale reannouncements, restatements of what has gone before and what we knew might happen in the future. There is little, indeed nothing, that is new.

It is disappointing, when concerns about NHS provision are at an unprecedented level, that—apart from welcome measures on mental health—the First Minister had so little to say on health issues.

It is surprising, when the recent actions of the First Minister's colleague, Chancellor Gordon Brown, threaten to create massive problems for Scottish industry and business, that no measures are being suggested to mitigate that damage. Given that attitude, is it so surprising that social work is the only growth industry in Scotland?

It is astonishing, when the Executive's stance on youth crime is in disarray and total confusion, that Jack McConnell did not take the opportunity to clarify the position. These are difficult days for Scotland's parents. The message from the

Executive is almost schizophrenic: on the one hand, parents can be sent to prison for moderately disciplining their children, on the other, they can be sent to prison for the misdeeds of their children.

What is the Executive's policy on youth crime? There are some good ideas, but they are Conservative ones. The Executive now enunciates the same ideas that the Conservatives proposed when the issue was first debated in Parliament six months ago. That is progress of a sort, but why did not the Executive support us then? There is a total lack of clarity. If the Executive is serious about tackling child crime, it should not remit the matter to committees or put proposals out for consultation or into some future Labour manifesto. The Executive should legislate now by amending the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Bill, which is before the Justice 2 Committee, to include the proposed measures. It is manifest from the Executive's failure to legislate that, at the end of the day, nothing will happen.

There is also confusion about the proposed agricultural holdings bill. I hope that the Deputy First Minister will, in his summing up, make it clear whether it is intended to include a pre-emptive right to buy in that bill.

The main problems are with what has not been mentioned. There is nothing to improve public services or democracy. The lip service that has been paid by means of the proposed public appointments and public bodies bill demonstrates that, on that issue, the Executive is going nowhere. The response to David McLetchie's question made it clear that, as far as Labour is concerned, our public bodies will in future still be stuffed full of Labour quangonistas.

There is little for anyone in this morning's statement: there is nothing for the beleaguered countryside but more meddlesome legislation; nothing for the towns but continuing crime and social order problems; nothing for business or employment; nothing for the young, as education standards fall and the McCrone settlement seems to be unravelling; and nothing for the old, as health care provision comes under increasing stress. Although waiting lists are not growing, the figures that were given this morning do not offer encouragement. There is nothing to encourage or inspire or to provide the hope that Scottish devolution can make the difference that we all want it to make. This depressing groundhog-day debate has exposed the Executive as lacking in ambition to the point of complacency. To paraphrase the poet Gray, ambition certainly does not mock their useful toil.

Is it not ironic that an Executive in which the personnel changes with such frequent and monotonous regularity should seem so tired? Is it not time that the First Minister examined in detail

his electoral programme? Is it not time that he told his ministers to produce plans and projects that might improve the life of Scotland's people and make a difference? If he and his ministers fail to do that, the devolution project could be jeopardised.

The legislation that has been proposed is inadequate for Scotland's requirements. The Executive is tired and should be replaced; indeed, it will be replaced next year.

12:13

Roseanna Cunningham (Perth) (SNP): SNP members will not disagree that the Executive's priorities should be, to quote an Executive motion,

"to deliver first class public services that help create a Scotland full of opportunity, where children can reach their full potential",

but that is where we must part company, because, since day one, the Executive has failed to deliver those first-class services and has failed Scotland's children. It has also failed today to convince anyone otherwise, or to convince anyone that anything is about to change. What is needed from the Executive is not a trite restatement of its supposed priorities or a tick-box approach to government—but it appears that that is its philosophy, for which Duncan Hamilton was looking. Even with such a tick-box approach, there are the many gaps that members have mentioned.

A draft nature conservation bill is planned for next spring. I wonder whether the minister can confirm that the Executive will not legislate to increase penalties for wildlife crime, despite the fact that that was promised soon. The proposal for a draft bill next spring suggests to me that that is not going to happen.

The Executive should acknowledge its failure in respect of public services, and its programme should contain a genuine commitment to change. However, the words genuine and new Labour do not fit easily into the same sentence—and new Labour calls the shots here, regardless of what the Liberal Democrats like to think. Effectively, what we have heard is the Executive's new year resolution—a bit late in the year—which will, no doubt, go the way of all new year resolutions. It might try to hide the fact from the rest of us; it might even try to convince itself otherwise; but in reality all that the Executive is offering are more of the same empty pledges that have been made throughout the short life of the Parliament. Sometimes, it feels as though the only things that the Executive has delivered on have been SNP policies, which it first derides, then thinks about and eventually adopts. The Executive's refusal to acknowledge that shows that, when Jack McConnell talks about consensus, he is using a

different dictionary from the rest of us.

Never mind how much has been spent here or what review has been undertaken there; what has actually been achieved, and has the Executive kept the promises that it has made? Let us consider just a couple of its justice pledges. A youth crime strategy was promised by March 2001, but the Executive has failed to produce one. No further evidence of that failure is necessary than the newspapers from the past fortnight. The recommendations of the youth crime advisory group, which were accepted, were funded at only 60 per cent of the level of finance that was necessary for their implementation.

One of the other pledges was to develop more effective community penalties for offenders. However, Tuesday's debate showed that despite the rhetoric, on which most of us agreed, the picture is one of failure. The prison population reached record levels in 2001 and the use of community disposals remains highly variable. For example, community service is used by courts in Dundee twice as often as by courts in Glasgow. Even the Minister for Justice expects continued failure, as he thinks that prisoner numbers will rise even further. If the Executive does not have confidence in its policies, why should it expect anyone else to have confidence in them?

What have we had? Broken promise upon empty pledge upon hollow words. Members should not take it just from me, however. We have heard today a guddle about PR. Frankly, the Lib Dems appear to be in a desperate state on that. They seem to be relying on Tricia Marwick's member's bill to deliver their key policy. What does that say about them and their input into the Executive? On health, I quote Gavin Tait, a consultant orthopaedic surgeon:

"Short termism, penny pinching, parochialism, and micro-management by government are all preventing rational and rapid development of the [health] service".

On children, I quote Henry Maitles of the University of Strathclyde:

"As the Scottish parliament enters its third year, virtually no impact has been made on child poverty".

On transport, I quote David Begg:

"We had one of the lowest levels of investment (as % of GDP) in transport".

Finally, as John Swinney pointed out, poverty—which underlies so much of what we debate in the Parliament and which is the root cause of so many problems—is one of the Executive's most abject failures.

Yet so much could be done. The Executive has adopted a huge number of SNP policies, whether it wants to admit that or not. Perhaps it should go the distance and adopt a few more, such as the

idea of a public service trust. Maybe the Executive will introduce that anyway—maybe that is what it will use to get itself off the hook of the prison estates review and to make a real difference to Scottish health and education. John Swinney dealt in detail with the issue of public services. However, the biggest and best thing that Executive members could do, in adopting an SNP stance, would be to start to behave like grown-ups and take on the responsibility of grown-up Government. Some of John McAllion's comments were relevant to that.

Andrew Wilson did well to remind members of the facts about the economic reality facing Scotland; it is a reality of decline that the Executive seems to think is just fine by it. Well, it is not. The only way to make a change is to stop playing about with money handed over by Westminster and start governing Scotland the way it should be governed—as an independent nation.

One part of the problem is the Executive's incompetence; another is that Parliament does not have the power that is needed to transform Scottish society. The First Minister may have no ambition for his country, but if we want to create a Scotland that is full of opportunity rather than be content with a land of disappointment, and if we want to create the circumstances in which our children can reach their full potential, rather than be content with a country that is unable to fulfil its potential, then the only way forward is with independence.

12:21

The Deputy First Minister and Minister for Justice (Mr Jim Wallace): I hope that I start on a consensual note by thanking all members who took part in what at times was a lively debate. There were many thoughtful contributions. There was also a general welcome, from all parts of the chamber, for what the First Minister said about the legislative programme. I echo those members who expressed our collective gratitude, as a Parliament, to the people of Aberdeen, to Aberdeen City Council and to our hosts, the University of Aberdeen, for making us most welcome in their city in this special week. *[Applause.]*

Some speakers—Nicol Stephen, Brian Fitzpatrick and even Dennis Canavan to some extent—reflected that what was announced today builds on solid and stable foundations. Parliament has passed a range of legislation during the past three years that addresses issues of great relevance to the people of Scotland and which has made a difference to them. Substantive acts have been passed on housing, transport, standards in our schools and health and community care. Those are important issues for the everyday lives

of the people of Scotland. Parliament has legislated on those issues and parliamentary committees, with members from all parties, have scrutinised that legislation. I believe that Scotland is a much better country today because we have a Parliament that has passed that legislation.

We want to act on the First Minister's statement by building on the coherent approach and foundations of the past three years. In doing so, we want to reflect the priorities and ethos of the partnership Administration, promoting social justice while recognising that fostering a spirit of enterprise in Scotland helps us to develop the social justice agenda. The theme of helping the vulnerable in Scotland underpins much of what was announced today and much of what we have done in Parliament. One of the acts that Parliament can be most proud of is the Adults with Incapacity (Scotland) Act 2000, which brings practical help to the 100,000 households in Scotland in which people care for an adult who does not have the capacity to take legal decisions.

It is worth remembering that south of the border the Law Commission for England and Wales published a parallel report to the Scottish Law Commission's report. The English report was published at the same time as the Scottish report, but the English report lies unimplemented on the shelf.

We are proposing a mental health bill, which has been welcomed on all sides and which will address the needs of some of the most vulnerable members of our community. A mental health bill will undoubtedly form an important piece of work for the Health and Community Care Committee this autumn. To pick up on a point that Ben Wallace made, we are not proposing a bill for health reform but a white paper, as the First Minister said.

There will also be a bill to protect children and a bill to provide additional support needs for children. Mike Russell asked how that might be developed beyond legislation. I know that Cathy Jamieson has been engaging in seminars for parents and professionals to ensure that much good work will have been done to underpin the work of putting the legislation on the statute book. In addition, we recognise that there is a shortage of social workers who are interested in having responsibility for children. However, as Mike Russell probably knows, the Executive is engaging with COSLA and individual local authorities to promote recruitment and retention.

Andrew Wilson: The minister is correct to point out the fact that the benefit of having power closer to the people is that legislation can be dealt with more quickly. With that in mind, will he reflect on the fact that there have already been five pieces of consultation on the issue of proportional

representation for local government and that there is set to be another? Will he confirm today that the sixth piece of consultation will be the final one and that it will be followed quickly by action?

Mr Wallace: I was going to deal with PR later but I will deal with it now. A consultation paper is available at the moment. It is important to stress that the electoral system that we use for our local authorities is not the plaything or the property of any political party. It is important that we move forward consensually. Andy Kerr has met with representatives of nine local authorities in the past few weeks to engage with them in that consultation. I must point out that, if we had waited for the SNP to introduce proportional representation for elections to the Scottish Parliament, we would never have had it. It was delivered only because Liberal Democrats and the Labour party worked together in the Scottish Constitutional Convention.

Homeless people make up another section of vulnerable people in our communities and a homelessness bill was proposed in the statement that members heard. Another great achievement of the Scottish Parliament is that we are on course to meet our target of eliminating involuntary rough sleeping in Scotland by next year. The indignity that is felt by people who do not have a roof over their heads is being tackled by the Executive and we can legitimately take some pride in that.

Tommy Sheridan: The minister mentioned the Executive's targets for homelessness, but what is the Executive's target for tackling child poverty? There were 300,000 children living in poverty when the Executive was elected and there are still 300,000 children living in poverty.

Mr Wallace: A number of people have mentioned the question of children in poverty. In 1996-97, 34 per cent of Scottish children lived in low-income households. By 2000-01, relative child poverty in Scotland had fallen to 30 per cent and to 21 per cent in absolute terms. It is clear that the Executive takes the issue of child poverty seriously. We have invested £24 million in a child poverty package to support lone parents into further and higher education and we are investing £475 million in pre-school education and child care. On early intervention, we are making available places for every three and four-year-old child. That is an effective way of tackling child poverty.

Des McNulty mentioned the importance of community involvement and spoke about the initiative that was announced by the First Minister of engaging people in all parties who have good ideas and who have introduced good members' bills. We want to do what we can to make those bills better and address issues that are important to communities. Andrew Wilson seemed to

dismiss that sort of thing as small beer, but I have always believed that, if Governments and Parliaments are incapable of resolving the small issues that matter to people and which they deal with every day, people will have little confidence in our ability to address the major issues.

The Scottish Parliament has reflected the needs of all of Scotland, including our rural communities. I will answer Bill Aitken's question: a pre-emptive right to buy is to be included in the agricultural holdings bill, as I thought was already quite clear.

Alasdair Morrison and George Lyon talked about crofting reform. A white paper on the subject is due to be published. Alasdair Morrison talked about the tangible evidence of investment in his constituency and mentioned the new buildings that the First Minister had opened on his visit. Following that visit, the First Minister came to my constituency to open an air terminal and cut the first turf for an independent landing system.

Nicol Stephen and Roseanna Cunningham mentioned wildlife crime. I understand that many have been appalled by the recent spate of wildlife crime incidents. I assure members that we intend to act immediately and will lodge amendments to the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Bill to provide the police with stronger powers of arrest in wildlife crime cases and give Scotland's courts the option to send offenders to prison, as this is one case in which alternatives to custody are not working. The message to wildlife criminals is clear: we will not tolerate the destruction of Scotland's magnificent natural heritage.

We heard almost nothing from the Conservatives other than that we should go the whole hog and follow them on health. That is the kind of health whole hog that Dr Liam Fox, the Conservative health spokesman at Westminster, talks about: persuading the public that the NHS is not working, convincing them that it cannot work and looking to fund it from savings from their pockets.

From John Swinney, we heard about independence. We all know the SNP's obsession with independence. In its document "Exploding the Myths of Independence", there are 211 mentions of independence. How many mentions of patients are there? There are none. How many mentions of nurses are there? There are none. How many mentions of doctors are there? There are none. How many mentions of ancillary staff are there? There are none. How many mentions of tackling crime are there? There are none. How many mentions of teachers are there? There are none.

That says it all: the SNP's obsession with independence does not address the issues that matter to the people of Scotland. The Executive is addressing the issues of importance to the people

of Scotland. It is delivering and will continue to deliver in the year ahead.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

12:31

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): The next item of business is consideration of two Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask Euan Robson to move motion S1M-3164, on the approval of Scottish statutory instruments, and motion S1M-3166, on the designation of lead committees.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the following instruments be approved—

the draft Scotland Act 1998 (Modifications of Schedule 5) Order 2002;

the draft Scotland Act 1998 (Transfer of Functions to the Scottish Ministers etc) Order 2002; and

the Food Protection (Emergency Prohibitions) (Amnesic Shellfish Poisoning) (West Coast) (No 4) (Scotland) Order 2002 (SSI 2002/231).

That the Parliament agrees that the Local Government Committee is designated as Lead Committee in consideration of the Local Government in Scotland Bill and that the Transport and the Environment Committee and the Education, Culture and Sport Committee be secondary committees.—[*Euan Robson.*]

Business Motion

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S1M-3165, in the name of Patricia Ferguson, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out the business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Wednesday 12 June 2002

2.30 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Stage 1 Debate on the University of St. Andrews (Postgraduate Medical Degrees) Bill

followed by Executive Debate on the Value of Participation in Sport increasing the Quality of Life in Scotland

followed by Motion on the Publication of the Scottish Parliamentary Ombudsman and Health Service Ombudsman for Scotland's Annual Report for 2001-02

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 13 June 2002

9.30 am Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party Business

followed by Business Motion

2.30 pm Question Time

3.10 pm First Minister's Question Time

3.30 pm Executive Debate on Reform of the Common Fisheries Policy

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 19 June 2002

2.30 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Stage 3 Debate on the Scottish Parliamentary Standards Commissioner Bill

followed by Local Government Committee Debate on its Report on Local Government Finance

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 20 June 2002

9.30 am Scottish National Party Business
followed by Business Motion
 2.30 pm Question Time
 3.10 pm First Minister's Question Time
 3.30 pm Stage 1 Debate on the School Meals (Scotland) Bill
followed by Financial Resolution in respect of the School Meals (Scotland) Bill
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business

(b) that the Justice 1 Committee reports to the Justice 2 Committee by 16 June 2002 on the Act of Sederunt (Fees of Solicitors in the Sheriff Court) (Amendment) 2002 and that the Justice 2 Committee reports to the Justice 1 Committee by 16 June 2002 on the draft Civil Legal Aid (Financial Conditions) (Scotland) (No 2) Regulations 2002, the draft Advice and Assistance (Financial Conditions) (Scotland) (No 2) Regulations 2002 and by 23 June 2002 on the draft Criminal Justice Act 1988 (Offensive Weapons) Amendment (Scotland) Order 2002; and

(c) that Stage 1 of the Debt Arrangement and Attachment (Scotland) Bill be completed by 20 September 2002.—
 [Euan Robson.]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Tommy Sheridan has asked to speak against the motion. You have up to five minutes, Mr Sheridan.

12:32

Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP): I do not need anything like five minutes to speak in opposition to the business motion. My opposition is to the final paragraph, which concerns the time that has been set aside for stage 1 of the Debt Arrangement and Attachment (Scotland) Bill, which is to be completed by 20 September.

My concern is that the time scale will not allow the full range of anti-poverty and community groups to give evidence on the bill. Such evidence was influential in the consideration of the Abolition of Poindings and Warrant Sales Bill. It will not be able to be heard because of the tightness of the schedule if we stick to 20 September.

I hope that the Minister for Parliamentary Business will agree to delay the time scale by at least a month to allow more witnesses who represent the anti-poverty and community groups to be invited. Those groups will be opposed to the bill, which simply seeks to reintroduce poindings and warrant sales under another name.

12:33

The Deputy Minister for Parliamentary Business (Euan Robson): I have no intention of involving myself in a debate about stage 1 with Mr

Sheridan, but I will explain the background. The bill was introduced on 7 May 2002 after wide consultation with all interests. It must complete its passage through the Parliament by the end of the year to meet the deadline that the Parliament has predetermined.

The Social Justice Committee timetable works within that tight time frame. The committee is taking oral and written evidence between May and July, extending into the parliamentary recess to ensure that as much time as possible is given to the stage 1 evidence gathering. The stage 1 debate will take place after the summer recess by 20 September. That will give members ample time to consider the bill. Stage 3 must be completed during November to enable royal assent to be given and the bill to be enacted by the end of December 2002. The timetable was agreed not only by the Parliamentary Bureau but by the Social Justice Committee.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The question is, that motion S1M-3165 be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, Brian (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (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)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (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)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Lab)
 Hamilton, Mr Duncan (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Harding, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Jenkins, Ian (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)

Johnstone, Alex (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 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)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McIntosh, Mrs Lyndsay (Central Scotland) (Con)
 McLeish, Henry (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McLeod, Fiona (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McMahon, Mr Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Morgan, Alasdair (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 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)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mr Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Ochil) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North-East Fife) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thomson, Elaine (Aberdeen North) (Lab)
 Ullrich, Kay (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)
 Wilson, Andrew (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Young, John (West of Scotland) (Con)

AGAINST

Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 85, Against 2, Abstentions 0.

Motion agreed to.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I remind members that we start again at 2 pm.

12:35

Meeting suspended until 14:00.

14:00

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): Before we begin this afternoon's business—the last part of our meeting in Aberdeen—I would like to record the Parliament's thanks to the University of Aberdeen and Aberdeen City Council for the excellent arrangements that they have made for our three meeting days. I have no hesitation in repeating what members have told me: we have greatly enjoyed all the events surrounding our meeting here, we appreciate the efficiency of all the burdensome technical facilities that have been provided and we welcome the pleasant helpfulness of all the staff who have assisted us. It will be for a future Parliament to decide whether to continue occasional meetings outside Edinburgh. We have been greatly heartened by the experience and by the warmth of the people of Aberdeen. We are deeply grateful. [*Applause.*]

Question Time

SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

Safety Review (A9)

1. Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive what plans it has to carry out a safety review of the A9 south of Perth. (S1O-5247)

The Deputy Minister for Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning (Lewis Macdonald): We have recently received the findings of a safety review of the A9 between Perth and Stirling and further work will be undertaken on the basis of that study.

Murdo Fraser: The minister will be aware of the concerns of residents of Auchterarder and Blackford about the safety of the junctions that serve those communities. Can the minister assure us that those junctions will be upgraded before any further housing development takes place in those areas?

Lewis Macdonald: I can confirm that we are examining proposals for upgrading junctions at Auchterarder and Blackford to accommodate developments that are proposed or which are at the planning stage. We expect the developers in those cases to meet the majority of the costs involved in such roadworks.

Roseanna Cunningham (Perth) (SNP): I listened to the minister's reply with interest. He will be aware that one of the big issues in a constituency such as mine is access for slow-moving traffic joining roads such as the A9. That is also a huge problem on the A90. I want to raise an

issue on which I have corresponded with the minister, which is the Middlebank to Inchmichael link road. Many people want that road, including the local roads department, the police and the National Farmers Union of Scotland. I think that the minister's department accepts in principle that the road would be a good thing, even if it does not translate that into practice. Can the minister give any hope to my constituents about the future of that proposal? Will he agree at least to meet them, rather than simply suggest that they meet the local project director?

Lewis Macdonald: I suggest that Roseanna Cunningham's constituents, whom she has represented in correspondence with me, should take up the offer of a meeting with local officials. Following that meeting, I would welcome any further representations that she wishes to make. We have committed significant funds to creating grade-separated junctions on that stretch of the A90—that is the priority to improve road safety on that stretch of road. We will consider how to augment the proposals in order further to improve road safety.

Social Inclusion

2. Trish Godman (West Renfrewshire) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive how it plans to work with communities in order to promote social inclusion. (S10-5259)

The Minister for Social Justice (Ms Margaret Curran): We are investing more than £192 million in social inclusion partnerships to regenerate our most needy communities. Communities Scotland has been established to support our regeneration approach and to address the most persistent problems of disadvantaged communities.

Trish Godman: Does the minister agree that a key strategy of social inclusion is to make communities involved in more meaningful consultation? Does she agree that some communities, including the one that I represent, are concerned that consultation is sometimes tokenistic? Can she assure me that community groups will be involved in decision-making processes, not just in one-off consultations?

Ms Curran: I would be extremely concerned if our approach was viewed as tokenistic. I am committed to ensuring that our approaches are not cosmetic. Consultation with communities and their participation and engagement with us is deep-seated because we understand that real solutions lie within that process. It can help us to understand the key issues that surround service delivery and it can help us to solve the problem of how to develop new patterns of service delivery.

We are considering that process quite comprehensively. We recognise the diversity of the communities in urban and rural Scotland and

we will address the issue that the member has raised.

Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP): Will the minister explain how she can hope to deliver social inclusion when the budgets for social inclusion partnerships have been underspent by a total of £9.6 million over the past two years, including over £1 million in the minister's constituency? Will the minister guarantee that that underspend will, in addition to this year's budget, be used for deprived communities and not recycled for ministerial announcements elsewhere?

Ms Curran: Linda Fabiani betrays a depressing superficiality of approach, which has been pointed out to her in the past. When we work with community organisations we often see that, as projects are developed and resources are spent, we have to go at their pace. Sometimes that does not fit in with the budget lines that the Scottish Executive has developed.

We have imaginative partnership arrangements in which we recognise end-year flexibility and we allow carry-over of projects. That ensures the flexibility and the partnerships that we need to be able to deliver real change. That is happening throughout Scotland because of our commitment to social inclusion partnerships.

Mrs Lyndsay McIntosh (Central Scotland) (Con): Further to Miss Fabiani's question, is the minister thinking of providing an evaluation of the effectiveness of social inclusion partnerships?

Ms Curran: I thought that it was a matter of public knowledge that we have a rigorous monitoring and evaluation process for social inclusion partnerships. I look at those monitoring reports regularly and understand each and every issue—perhaps that is an exaggeration; modesty forbids me from saying that. I should say that I understand the key issues. I take seriously the monitoring and evaluation of SIPs. I acknowledge that some have failed and, in response to that, we must ensure that we address those issues. The forthcoming community regeneration statement will outline how we intend to do that.

Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West): Does the Executive seriously believe that social inclusion will be enhanced by sending more young offenders and their parents to prison? Instead of copying David Blunkett's right-wing reactionary agenda, will the Scottish Executive take steps to end the national scandal of Scotland having one of the highest under-21 prison populations in the world?

Ms Curran: Mr Canavan is being slightly opportunistic in asking me that question. He knows that that question should properly be addressed to other ministers.

However, I am happy to restate the Executive's view that, as we tackle the range of issues that are faced by young people, from poverty to offending, we acknowledge that our approach must be comprehensive. The Executive understands that many challenges face young people and that social inclusion approaches demand that we put in place the services and projects that those young people need in order to prevent them from getting into offending behaviour.

However, in itself, that is not the answer to some of the serious problems in society. We need a balanced approach of prevention, social inclusion and social justice, as well as proper justice systems.

General Practitioner Contracts

3. George Lyon (Argyll and Bute) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive whether the new general practitioner contracts currently under negotiation at United Kingdom level could allow GPs to opt out of providing out-of-hours cover in Scotland and to what extent it is involved in the negotiations. (S10-5278)

The Minister for Health and Community Care (Malcolm Chisholm): The negotiations are being taken forward by the NHS Confederation on behalf of the four health departments in the UK and the UK general practitioners committee. The contractual framework has been agreed by the two sides and the four UK health ministers have agreed to the principles on which it is based.

It is proposed that GPs could opt out of providing out-of-hours cover after a preparatory period during which primary care trusts would ensure that alternative arrangements are in place. The confederation and the GPC are setting up a working group to work on how the new contract would operate in remote and rural areas. The working group will meet in, and be run from, Scotland.

George Lyon: I thank the minister for his answer. I would like to make the minister aware of deep concerns in my constituency. At a meeting with the lead GP last week, he said that he believes that if the proposal is not managed well, the impact on rural Scotland might be that GP services would break down if the opt-out clause was enacted in full.

The Presiding Officer: Let us hear a question.

George Lyon: He also said that he believed that there would be difficulties in recruiting GPs. Can the minister assure me that those concerns will be taken into consideration and examined closely before any final agreements are reached?

Malcolm Chisholm: I assure George Lyon that there is no question of the scenario that he

outlined taking place. Everyone is agreed that there have to be special arrangements in remote and rural areas. Indeed, no opt-outs will take place anywhere until alternative arrangements are in place. Notwithstanding that, there has been a wide welcome for the proposed new contract in terms of its emphasis on quality and outcomes, its increased focus on primary care teams, and the reduction in bureaucracy that it will bring about. Of course, it will feature in the white paper to which the First Minister referred this morning.

Margaret Jamieson (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab): Does the minister agree that the roll-out of NHS 24 will provide a comprehensive out-of-hours service, thereby reducing the level of intervention that is required by GPs in providing out-of-hours services? Will he undertake to ensure that account is taken of that in the current negotiations?

Malcolm Chisholm: I paid a visit to NHS 24 here in Aberdeen yesterday and I was pleased to hear how the GPs in Grampian have very much welcomed, even in these early days, the effect of NHS 24. It is in its first month, but already it is having a beneficial effect on their patients and on their work loads. As NHS 24 is rolled out into the Highlands and other remote and rural areas, it will be of considerable help to GPs in dealing with some of the problems that George Lyon highlighted.

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): The minister should be aware that at a recent presentation by GPs to MSPs it was brought to our attention that a substantial number of GPs are aged 50 and over. The same is true of practice nurses. What is the minister doing to address the fact that there might be problems with shortfalls not far down the line?

Malcolm Chisholm: In the near future, we will receive the report from Professor John Temple, the president of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh, on medical work force planning. That is part of the much wider work on work force planning that we are doing, and which will feature in the debate at 3.30 pm. I assure Christine Grahame that having the right number of doctors, including GPs, is at the centre of that agenda.

Health Improvement

4. Paul Martin (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what further measures are being taken to improve health and tackle cancer and heart disease. (S10-5297)

The Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care (Mrs Mary Mulligan): The Executive is taking forward a wide range of measures to address determinants of health. As a result, fewer people are dying from coronary heart

disease, cancer and stroke, which are Scotland's biggest killers.

Paul Martin: Does the minister share my view that it is unacceptable that my constituents in Glasgow Springburn suffer from lung cancer at a rate that is 93 per cent above the Scottish average? What specific action has been taken in Glasgow Springburn to deal with that issue?

Mrs Mulligan: I recognise that throughout Scotland there are health outcome differentials. The Executive is seeking to tackle those. Greater Glasgow NHS Board is receiving £12 million between 2000 and 2004 from the health improvement fund, which will be targeted at areas such as heart disease and cancer and at examination of ways in which we can improve the situation.

Shona Robison (North-East Scotland) (SNP): Is the minister aware of the problem that was raised this morning at the north-east Scotland cancer co-ordinating and advisory group conference of the 30 per cent vacancy rate for therapy radiographers? Only 24 therapy radiographers are trained every year, most of whom are lured abroad, so what will the minister do to address that serious problem?

Mrs Mulligan: Nobody could be unaware of the problem with regard to radiographers, and we are seeking to tackle it. As my colleague Malcolm Chisholm said in answer to a previous question, the work force planning group is examining issues across a range of skills to try to bring people into professions such as radiography. I recognise that that will not happen overnight, because training takes so long, but we need to plan for the future, which is what we are doing.

The Presiding Officer: Question 5 is withdrawn.

Waste Incinerator (Aberdeen)

6. Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it supports the proposal to build a waste incinerator in Aberdeen. (S10-5250)

The Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Ross Finnie): In view of Scottish ministers' possible future involvement in the planning application, it would be inappropriate for me to comment on the proposal at this stage. However, as environment minister, I am concerned that the draft area waste plan for the north-east of Scotland proposes early development of new energy-from-waste capacity, whereas most other plans propose to put the emphasis on recycling and composting. I have made it clear that I do not want a rush to burn waste as an early alternative to landfill. I will therefore examine carefully the north-east

proposals and seek further explanation of them.

Robin Harper: I thank the minister for his clear reply. I will ask him to clarify the Executive's policies further. The minister said that incineration might not fit in with the north-east area waste plan. Would it be eligible for strategic waste funding? Does the Executive have an opinion on how incinerators can ever be classed as part of a best practicable environmental option—a BPEO?

Ross Finnie: I will, because of the reasons that I gave in my first answer, deal with the principle behind Robin Harper's first question. If a proposal that sought grant from the strategic waste fund did not meet the criteria that we have set, that would call into question whether we could grant-aid it. A bit of a carrot-and-stick approach is taken to ensure that people comply with the best practicable environmental option.

It is interesting that proposals for incineration have tended to come from areas in the Highlands and Islands. What matters is the BPEO. We have made clear the hierarchy of our waste strategy and we are determined that people should start at the top of that hierarchy. Energy from waste is the next worst option to landfill. That is how we will approach the matter.

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): In the light of what the minister said, is he in principle for or against incineration as part of a waste disposal strategy?

Ross Finnie: I have made my view clear. We will not allow mixed-waste incineration. We will permit waste incineration only when energy can be extracted from it and we will not favour it in the hierarchy of the waste strategy. Its appropriateness will depend on cost, distance and the topography of the land that is involved. A range of factors are involved. Transporting waste vast distances is not the best practicable environmental option.

Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab): In relation to emissions from incineration or landfill sites, will the minister, in developing his waste strategy, bring forward the work that his team is undertaking to tighten, ahead of 2010, the PM10 standards that regulate particulate matter and air quality?

Ross Finnie: Yes. We are keen to do so.

Schools (Deferred Entry)

7. Brian Adam (North-East Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what assessment it has made of the impact of deferred entry to schools on local authority education budgets. (S10-5292)

The Minister for Education and Young People (Cathy Jamieson): The Executive has not yet made any assessment, as the extended

entitlement to pre-school provision in respect of deferred entry came into effect only at the beginning of the 2001-02 school year. The first children who were eligible were those who reached the age of four in January or February 2002. They will begin their deferred year in August 2002.

Brian Adam: Is the minister aware that, in Aberdeen, deferred entry has had a 15 per cent uptake and that the impact on the local education budget will be a shortfall of £300,000 to £400,000? The national target is a 9 per cent uptake, which will be compensated for, but that suggests that Aberdeen City Council will have to make cuts in its education provision or the Executive will have to make up the shortfall. Which will it be?

Cathy Jamieson: When the deferrals working group examined the resources that would be reintegrated into the 2002-03 settlement for pre-school education, the total funding was £137 million. Aberdeen City Council's share of that amounted to more than £4.8 million, which is a 42 per cent increase in the level of pre-school education funding that was claimed in 2001-02. I have discussed the matter with the council and the local constituency MSPs.

Elaine Thomson (Aberdeen North) (Lab): Is the minister aware of recent research in Aberdeen that shows that, although overall attainment in primary 1 to primary 3 is increasing, a gap in attainment is widening between children from well-off areas and those from less well-off areas? Obtaining nursery education for children from less well-off areas and allowing them to stay in nursery education to mature a bit more is vital to our objectives of social inclusion. I ask the minister to examine that issue in relation to deferred places.

Cathy Jamieson: The points that Elaine Thomson made demonstrate exactly why we gave parents the option of keeping their children in the pre-school sector for another year if that is of benefit to their children. The member will be pleased to hear that, when I met with representatives of the local authority yesterday, they gave me some facts and figures on the subject.

I stress that the settlement that was made is intended to remain in place until the end of 2004. We will monitor the situation and I will request further information in order to examine the issue in more detail.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I wonder why the Executive is only now waking up to the problem when the Conservatives identified it at the time of the 1999 elections. Could the reason be that we have had three ministers with responsibility for education in the past three years?

Cathy Jamieson: I remind the member that it was this Executive—a Labour-Liberal Democrat coalition—that introduced proposals to ensure that every three and four-year-old has a pre-school place. I am particularly pleased about that. I am delighted that we have delivered on that manifesto commitment.

Criminal Justice (Social Work Services)

8. Michael Matheson (Central Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive how it plans to improve the provision of criminal justice social work services. (S1O-5267)

The Deputy Minister for Justice (Dr Richard Simpson): We are building on the progress that has already been made both in modernising the structural arrangements for the delivery of the service and in improving the range and quality of community disposals. That is supported by a 50 per cent cash increase in funding over the three years to 2003-04.

Michael Matheson: The minister will be aware that, in March 2000, the Scottish Prison Service decided to invite tenders for the provision of social work in four of its prisons. Can the minister explain why the independent evaluation of the tendering process, which was due to be published in the middle of December last year, has been delayed on at least four occasions? The evaluation will not now be published until June this year. Does the minister agree with the Association of Directors of Social Work in Scotland that more effective criminal justice social work could be provided in our prisons if funding was given directly to the local authorities, instead of to the prison service?

Dr Simpson: The SPS was trying to introduce a new measure in order to get the best quality social work for the prison system. When such new measures are introduced, it is important to remember that we must examine them closely. The evaluation of that new pilot is with my officials and I expect it to be published in the near future. It is important that we consider the evaluation carefully before we develop the proposal in any way. It is vital that social work in the community and in the prison service work to the same sort of standards. We are moving strongly in that direction.

Scott Barrie (Dunfermline West) (Lab): The minister will be aware of the huge improvement in criminal justice social work services since the introduction of national standards and 100 per cent funding in 1990. Give that success, is the minister able to say whether he favours a similar approach being taken to the social work that is undertaken with young offenders who have supervision requirements under the children's hearing system? Will he pursue that matter with the Minister for Education and Young People?

Dr Simpson: It is important that the justice system is integrated and that it works to the same standards for young people and adults. The division between the two is sometimes false. It is important to apply even standards in our programmes to treat offending behaviour and in the evaluation of those programmes. I will take up discussions with my colleague and with the education department.

Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD): Will the minister consider the appointment of a person and a small high-powered team to bring together all the non-custodial sentence activities that are run by the state, as mentioned by Scott Barrie, and by the voluntary sector? At present, that is an inchoate area. We need a non-prison service to match the prison service. Will the minister consider that proposal?

Dr Simpson: The matter is not about matching the prison service, but about matching resources appropriately in order to treat offending behaviour. Prison should be used only when public safety is an issue. It is important to treat offenders across the board.

The problem is that a number of community disposals are being tried, because they need to be evaluated properly before they can be rolled out. However, many are being rolled out across the country. In the case of drug treatment and testing orders, the evaluation concluded that that disposal is highly successful. We will in due course draw together work on those disposals.

Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con): Does the minister agree that, although community service penalties work very well in some areas, there is a lack of discipline and enforcement of such penalties in far too many other areas? If he does agree, will he consider how he might deal with that situation?

Dr Simpson: Mr Gallie has a point—*[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Order. It does happen.

Dr Simpson: As I said, Mr Gallie has a point—albeit a small one.

The important issue is to draw everything together. It is true that there are distinct variations in how areas use community service orders, which might reflect the fact that the number of breaches in some areas is higher than in others. The problem is that community service orders were introduced during the pre-drug era, and many who are now subject to them are initially not fit enough to carry them out. We think that a better approach is to have a combination of orders that will be delivered mainly through probation orders. That said, we are examining the matter closely.

National Health Service

9. Janis Hughes (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what action is being taken to rebuild the infrastructure of the NHS. (S10-5288)

The Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care (Mr Frank McAveety): Investment in NHS Scotland continues to increase through public and private sector investment. Because of that approach, we now have the largest ever hospital-building programme in the history of NHS Scotland.

Janis Hughes: I am particularly pleased that the minister mentioned the Executive's commitment to the hospital-building programme. Does he agree that the people of south Glasgow deserve better than the renovation of a Victorian hospital such as the Southern general hospital to provide the only acute in-patient facility south of the Clyde?

Mr McAveety: It would be inappropriate for the ministerial health team to comment in detail until we receive Greater Glasgow NHS Board's submission. However, we want to find out whether the building programmes that are proposed in the acute services review have the Glasgow people's consent, whether they will deliver hospital provision that is fit for this century, rather than last century, and whether they will produce a hospital that patients and staff feel makes a difference for them. Those discussions will take place over the next period. However, we will deliberate on the issue and we will listen to the views of Janis Hughes and other members from the south side of Glasgow.

John Farquhar Munro (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD): I am delighted that we are discussing proposals to improve the infrastructure of our national health service. What consideration is being given to the provision of modern general practitioner surgeries and visiting consultant facilities in Scotland's remote rural areas?

Mr McAveety: As we have made clear in previous debates, we are developing primary care support throughout Scotland. In fact, this very week, I visited the new million-pound Saltoun surgery in Fraserburgh, which will also identify ways in which we can address issues such as diabetes. We have implemented a range of strategies throughout Scotland, and will be introducing a fairly advanced programme of GP surgery development over the next few years.

Richard Lochhead (North-East Scotland) (SNP): Is the minister aware that out-patient waiting times in Grampian, which have been published today, show a 40 per cent increase in waiting times since Labour was elected to power in 1999? The figure has risen from 67 days to 71 days. Furthermore, the percentage of cases that

are seen within the nine-week target has fallen to 45 per cent. Does he agree that we are never going to improve the NHS infrastructure in Grampian as long as Grampian NHS Board, which carries out 10 per cent of NHS activity in Scotland, receives only 9 per cent of Scottish funding?

Mr McAveety: I have said on a number of occasions that we have committed ourselves to equity in health service delivery and investment throughout Scotland. The Arbuthnott report, which was very serious, thoughtful and considered, identified ways in which we should take such an approach in this country. I have met representatives of Grampian NHS Board and we have put in place a strategy to address its deficit over the next few years.

I assure the member that we are keen to deliver throughout Scotland a service that will make a difference. However, the difference is that although we are prepared to have those discussions with health boards and local authorities and to find innovative ways of investing in the health service, Richard Lochhead needs to explain to health boards how the SNP can deliver the capital investment that they require if it is still riven by its ideological opposition to some level of private sector involvement in the health service.

Teacher Induction Scheme

10. Dr Sylvia Jackson (Stirling) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what progress has been made on the introduction of the new teacher induction scheme. (S10-5268)

The Deputy Minister for Education and Young People (Nicol Stephen): From the Conservative benches—which I am unaccustomed to—I am pleased to confirm that, after much hard work, the new teacher induction scheme will be introduced, on target, in August.

Dr Jackson: As the deputy minister is fully aware, there is considerable concern among Stirling University education students that when they enter the teaching profession in January 2003 they may not be able to join the teacher induction scheme, unlike other education students, who will join the scheme in autumn 2002. Does the minister agree that, if that is the case, Stirling education students are being discriminated against? What steps is he taking to ensure that January 2003 entrants will be able to join the teacher induction scheme?

Nicol Stephen: It is true that the only guarantee in relation to the teacher induction scheme is for those joining the scheme at the start of the school year in August. The current scheme will be introduced in August this year, and the plan is that the scheme will start in August in subsequent years for all students. However, as the problem

has been drawn to our attention by local MSPs and others, we have examined the issue, as has the teacher induction group. Although there has been no change to the guarantee, there have been discussions with several local authorities that have indicated a willingness to take on student teachers as probationers earlier in the year. We would encourage that, we are pleased that those discussions are taking place and we hope that there is a satisfactory outcome for the students involved.

Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): The minister is clearly enjoying not only our policies but our benches as well. Up to 100 students at Stirling University who will graduate as school teachers will not be included in the scheme for probationers. Why was that group forgotten about? What is being done? Will the deadlines that the minister set be delivered on? Local authorities are making it clear that those deadlines are not yet being met.

Nicol Stephen: In relation to the overall working of the scheme and the deadlines that have been set, all primary probationers have now been notified of the local authority for which they will be working during their probationary year. All of them have been offered one of their top five choices, with three quarters offered their first-choice authority. It has been more difficult with the secondary probationers because of the range of subjects involved and the choices that the students have put forward. However, the Executive and the General Teaching Council for Scotland are on target to notify all secondary probationers of their training posts in early June.

I have little more to add in relation to the Stirling students, except to say that I am aware from my time in the enterprise and lifelong learning department that a range of issues affect Stirling students because of the two-term system that the university operates. We are in regular discussions with students and others from Stirling University, and we want to tackle and overcome those problems wherever possible.

Careers Guidance

11. Marilyn Livingstone (Kirkcaldy) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what progress is being made in implementing an all-age careers guidance service throughout Scotland. (S10-5275)

The Minister for Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning (Iain Gray): Careers Scotland was established on 1 April this year.

Marilyn Livingstone: I welcome the initiative, as I believe that the introduction of an all-age guidance service is long overdue. However, in the light of the alignment of the service with Scottish Enterprise and the understandable drive to meet

national standards, will the minister assure me that local flexibility and innovation in the service will not be lost?

Iain Gray: I am happy to give Marilyn Livingstone that assurance. The purpose of establishing Careers Scotland was to produce a nationally consistent careers service for all ages, but some 220 members serve on local advisory boards. In many instances, the service will be delivered through locally negotiated service agreements. That should ensure appropriate and effective local delivery of the service within the national framework.

Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP): What will the total spend on the new careers service be this year and what will it be next year?

Iain Gray: This year, it will be £33 million, compared with £23 million at the time of the establishment of the Parliament, which represents an increase of some 40 per cent over three years.

David Mundell (South of Scotland) (Con): The minister will be aware from the extensive evidence to the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee that careers advice in schools is vital. Will he undertake to work with the Minister for Education and Young People to ensure that there is such provision, not just through Careers Scotland, but through careers teachers in schools?

Iain Gray: Co-operation between the careers service and schools is key and I will discuss that issue with my colleague, but the locally negotiated service agreements are more important. They will ensure that careers advice is delivered in schools and give head teachers in particular a named contact at Careers Scotland and a say in how the service is delivered most appropriately for their pupils.

Listed Buildings

12. Elaine Thomson (Aberdeen North) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what action will be taken to ensure that payments in respect of insurance claims following damage to listed buildings are used to pay for the restoration work. (S1O-5296)

The Deputy Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport (Dr Elaine Murray): I am aware of the member's concerns, which arise from a case in Aberdeen that resulted in a fatal accident and considerable destruction to the city centre. However, transactions between an insurer and the party insured are not the responsibility of Government.

Elaine Thomson: I am glad that the minister is aware of the building at 41 Union Street, Aberdeen, which is causing the partial closure of Union Street. The building was listed and suffered

a fire. There was major damage and the building was left unrepaired for years while the owners pocketed the insurance money. Despite Aberdeen City Council's attempts to make the owners carry out repairs, they were not done. I ask the Scottish Executive to consider what can be done to give more power to local authorities to ensure that that will not happen with other listed buildings.

Dr Murray: Elaine Thomson and Lewis Macdonald brought the matter to my attention. As I was in the city, I took a stroll down Union Street to have a look at the building. I share the concern of the member and Aberdeen City Council that it has taken more than three years since the fire for repairs to the building to commence. It might be helpful if I briefly run through the powers that exist. [MEMBERS: "No."] I could be brief about the powers under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Act 1997, but if the member wishes to write to ask me to investigate the particular case in greater detail, I would be happy to do so.

The Presiding Officer: I am grateful to the member.

Rhona Brankin (Midlothian) (Lab): Does the minister agree that the recent unlawful and deliberate destruction of Lanrick Castle, which was a listed building in central Scotland, was an appalling act of vandalism? Will she undertake to look at the implications of that case and ensure that unscrupulous owners cannot wilfully destroy Scotland's built heritage in the future?

Dr Murray: Yes. I am sorry that I was not allowed to go through the various provisions that are available to local authorities. I share the member's concerns about the matter, which is being dealt with in the courts, as she will be aware. A number of powers are available to Scottish ministers and local authorities, but sometimes there are cost problems in using those powers. I am aware that costs can sometimes deter local authorities from taking action.

Lifeline Air Services

13. Tavish Scott (Shetland) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it will reconsider its policy on the provision of financial support for lifeline air services to islands in the light of evidence set out in the comparative study of public service obligations in Europe by Cranfield University. (S1O-5261)

The Deputy Minister for Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning (Lewis Macdonald): The future use of public service obligations in Scotland will be addressed in the forthcoming Scottish air transport consultation document, on which the Executive will seek detailed views.

Tavish Scott: I thank the minister for his reply and welcome the commitment to consider public service obligations as part of that study. Will he confirm the record level of spending given to Highlands and Islands Airports Ltd by the Scottish Executive but note that only £9.39 of the price of an air ticket relates to landing charges? In respect of the cost of flying between Aberdeen and Shetland, a £300 ticket is not greatly reduced by having lower landing charges. Will he undertake to visit my constituency and meet local people, businesses and public sector organisations to consider how best to take into account such factors in reviewing the consultation when it takes place?

Lewis Macdonald: Tavish Scott is right. Support from the Executive for Highlands and Islands Airports Ltd has trebled in the past five years and now stands at a record level of more than £21 million. As he says, the support that that provides to landing charges means that they account for a very small part of air fares within the Highlands and Islands. As part of our air transport consultation, we will seek detailed views on the possibilities of extending public service obligations. We will hold two major conferences—one in the north of Scotland and one in the south—and a number of further events on specific topics. I expect Shetland and other areas to bid to host some of those events in the course of the consultation during the summer.

Mr Kenny MacAskill (Lothians) (SNP): Given the importance of air links to our island communities, the fact that almost all, if not all, the PSOs in the UK are within Scotland and the fact that we have a Scottish Parliament, a Scottish transport minister and a Scottish transport department, why are PSOs dealt with by a London department rather than by the Scottish Executive? Is that evidence of the superior talents of the UK department or the incompetence of the Scottish Executive?

Lewis Macdonald: Unfortunately, Mr MacAskill does not understand that that is evidence of the fact that PSOs require to be negotiated within a European context. Therefore the United Kingdom, as the member state, is involved in the process.

Mr MacAskill's comments are clearly only an extension of his general push, which is to transfer subsidy from publicly owned airports in the Highlands and Islands to commercial airlines and the routes that they operate. We fundamentally disagree with that. We believe that to maintain lifeline services and PSOs we should continue to work in co-operation with the United Kingdom Government and continue to direct our support to the rural communities that are most in need of it.

Fishing (Seine Net)

14. Stewart Stevenson (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what action it is taking to encourage seine net fishing. (S10-5257)

The Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Ross Finnie): We are not specifically encouraging seine net fishing, nor are we discouraging it. The science shows that it has no particular conservation benefit and it is therefore essentially a commercial judgment for the fishermen concerned.

Stewart Stevenson: Is the minister aware that a significant minority of skippers believe that seine net fishing has significant environmental advantages and delivers better quality fish? Will he consider supporting the training necessary to bring more skippers into the seine net fishing industry?

Ross Finnie: I do not wish to be disrespectful to the views of that minority, but I repeat that recent trials have been inconclusive about whether the use of seine nets makes any difference when the same cod end is used. Therefore, the environmental benefit has not been proven. The case for seine nets can be argued in terms of quality, because of the swifter nature of the catch, but the trials to date do not prove conclusively the range of environmental benefits that some fishermen have posited. It is essentially a commercial matter for the fishermen concerned.

Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I agree with Stewart Stevenson that seine netting is a good form of fishing. It is nice to hear him talking about something sane for a change.

Does Ross Finnie accept that mesh size restrictions, which were proposed fundamentally with trawl nets in mind, will have a much more significant effect on seine net fishermen, whose nets are more static as they have mesh that does not close in the same way as that of a net pulled by a trawler? Has that point been taken into consideration when decisions have been taken about the mesh sizes of seine or purse nets? If not, will he please make that point?

Ross Finnie: That point is already taken into account. I assure Jamie McGrigor that in the trials that took place increased mesh sizes were fully taken into consideration. As I said, no significant difference was shown in the preliminary trials when the same cod end was used. The trials are continuing. There is no evidence to prove the benefits to which Jamie McGrigor and Stewart Stevenson refer.

Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): Has the minister taken into account in his calculations the great damage that can be done to the sea bed by

some of the more modern methods of trawling?

Ross Finnie: Yes. Those methods are taken into consideration and are under constant review. To produce sustainable fisheries, we must consider the methodology and the way in which nets are deployed.

Voluntary Sector

15. Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive whether there are any benefits from direct grant investment in the voluntary sector. (S1O-5298)

The Deputy Minister for Social Justice (Hugh Henry): Yes. We recognise the importance of the voluntary sector to Scottish society and to the economy. We believe that voluntary sector and community groups are in close touch with many parts of Scottish society and are well placed to identify and respond to changing needs. The sector is uniquely placed to tackle many of the challenging targets set by the Executive and it is already a major provider and innovator in housing, child care and community care. Direct funding of the voluntary sector is crucial to enable that work to continue.

Johann Lamont: Will the minister acknowledge that a key concern is the immense pressure on the voluntary sector to reinvent the wheel to secure funding? Does he agree that our funding strategy should not only encourage innovation but build on existing success? Will he confirm that the Scottish Executive will lead by example in its funding approaches so that, instead of spending time using their ingenuity to convince potential funders that their work is new, voluntary organisations can display in action that they carry out effective work in our local communities?

Hugh Henry: The Executive believes that encouraging innovation is essential. We want to examine and reward new methods of service delivery. Johann Lamont makes the valid point that we should not encourage the voluntary sector to rebadge or redefine work that has already been done to gain the label of innovation. A balance must be struck between encouraging new methods of service delivery and rewarding and sustaining the good-quality delivery that makes a contribution to communities throughout Scotland.

Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): How much of the £3 million that the Executive has invested in money advice is likely to end up with voluntary sector groups such as Citizens Advice Scotland? Does the Executive intend to move towards a system of universally available independent advice throughout Scotland?

Hugh Henry: There are different ways of providing money advice throughout the country; the provision is not systematic. In some

communities, the voluntary sector takes the lead, while in others the local authority takes the lead. We believe, to our encouragement, that local authorities will engage with the voluntary sector and other organisations to ensure that good-quality comprehensive money advice is available. We have made it clear to those who disburse the money that we want quality assurance and service-level agreements. We want any money that is spent to be additional to the money that has been provided. We want the best-quality advice to be delivered to those who need it, but we will not tolerate the indiscriminate spending of the £3 million without regard to the quality of the service.

NHS Foundation Trusts

16. Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive what plans it has to create national health service foundation trusts. (S1O-5285)

The Minister for Health and Community Care (Malcolm Chisholm): There are no plans to create NHS foundation trusts in Scotland.

Mary Scanlon: That is not a surprise. Given that the success of such hospitals is based on achieving high performance-assessment targets, better patient outcomes, value for money and good financial management, will the minister consider allowing Scottish hospitals the freedom to manage their affairs for the benefit of patients?

Malcolm Chisholm: I am sure that Mary Scanlon realises that foundation trusts do not exist in England, although there is a proposal to develop them. We believe in empowering front-line staff, but we also believe in more integrated single-system working. Our priorities are to bridge the gap between primary and acute care and to develop primary care services. It is not consistent with those priorities to have more independent acute hospitals that do their own thing.

Mr John McAllion (Dundee East) (Lab): Does the minister accept that the establishment of foundation trusts would, of necessity, lead to the reintroduction of the purchaser/provider split, thereby paving the way for the reintroduction of the internal market? Will he assure me that the Labour-led Executive, which abolished the hated internal market, will never reintroduce it into the national health service?

Malcolm Chisholm: Members will have noticed that David McLetchie tried to suggest this morning that we are reintroducing the internal market in the form of general practitioner fundholding. He would not take an intervention because he knew that that is not true. Of course, we would like to have more services in primary care and we wish to empower primary care teams. However, we do not want to recreate the internal market with all its

bureaucracy. Therefore, we will certainly not go down that route.

Ambulances (Angus)

17. Mr Andrew Welsh (Angus) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what plans there are to review the provision of ambulances in Angus. (S1O-5287)

The Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care (Mrs Mary Mulligan): The provision of ambulance services in Angus, as in the rest of Scotland, is the subject of on-going review by the Scottish Ambulance Service.

Mr Welsh: Is the minister aware of concern among Angus GPs about the one-hour ambulance requests from patients and their fears that crews and vehicles are simply insufficient? Given the continuing knock-on effects of the closure of acute services at Stracathro hospital, will she ensure that the ambulance service in Angus has the resources to allow it to provide the service that it wants to give?

Mrs Mulligan: I am aware that one GP has raised concerns about ambulance response times and is arranging a meeting with the general manager of Angus NHS Trust to discuss the matter. However, I am also aware that improvements have been made to the ambulance service, including the provision of seven additional, front-line emergency ambulance staff. All ambulance stations in Angus now operate cover 24 hours a day, seven days a week. A paramedic-led thrombolytic service has also been introduced and the service is being supported to improve its service on a daily basis.

Fines (Non-payment)

18. Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive what action it plans to take to reduce the number of people admitted to prisons for non-payment of fines. (S1O-5282)

The Deputy Minister for Justice (Dr Richard Simpson): The Executive is of the view that imprisonment for fine default should be a last resort. We are actively promoting the use of supervised attendance orders by the courts as an alternative to fines and will consider carefully any recommendations on fine default that emerge from the current review of summary justice.

Bill Aitken: Does the minister agree that the custodial sentences for non-payment are derisory, that supervised attendance orders are ineffective and that the only way to ensure payment and reduce the risk of imprisonment is to authorise direct deductions from pay or benefits? Will he approach the appropriate UK departments accordingly?

Dr Simpson: The answers to the first two parts of Bill Aitken's question are no and no. The custodial orders and their alternatives are working extremely well and are used highly effectively by many courts. Nonetheless, I refer to my answer to an earlier question, which was that we need to consider whether certain people are able to carry out community service orders. There are some problems with SAOs, and we will address those in the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Bill.

I inform Bill Aitken that 85 per cent of fines that are imposed by the district courts are paid and that the courts have powers, with certain restrictions, to work with the Department of Work and Pensions to deduct fines from a person's allowances. That power already exists for the courts, but it is restricted to ensure that individuals do not suffer and can still meet their necessary personal expenditure.

Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab): Prison sentences for fine default impact particularly on women and their children and are in effect a punishment for poverty. What measures is the Executive taking to reduce substantially the number of women who are received into, for example, Cornton Vale prison and to ensure that no one is imprisoned for fine default?

Dr Simpson: I do not have the figures for today, but yesterday there were no women prisoners in Cornton Vale prison for fine default. That is to be welcomed by all members. However, the last annual report showed that there were some 500 to 600 fine receptions into Cornton Vale, although they were for very short periods. The disruption that is caused by such receptions is unacceptable. The report "A Better Way" has set the Executive the challenging target of halving that number over the next few years. Through a number of measures, we will seek to achieve that reasonable objective.

The Presiding Officer: Question 19 has been withdrawn.

Public Appointments

20. Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what steps are being taken in order to encourage a wider range of candidates to come forward for public appointments. (S1O-5291)

The Minister for Finance and Public Services (Mr Andy Kerr): There is no doubt that we are still not attracting enough women, people from ethnic communities or people with disabilities to serve on non-departmental public bodies. I am committed to tackling that. The boards of NDPBs should reflect the social and cultural mix in Scotland. The creation of a Scottish commissioner for public appointments, with specific responsibility for

promoting diversity, should be a great step forward.

Jackie Baillie: I welcome the appointment of the commissioner and share the minister's view that that will make a significant difference. The Executive is making progress in appointing more women and more ethnic minority and disabled people to truly reflect Scottish society, but progress is slower than expected. What further positive measures can be taken? For example, there is targeting that recognises in particular the contribution that people can bring from life experience.

Mr Kerr: I share Jackie Baillie's view on targeting. The Executive will ensure that we target more appropriately. One of the best ways of increasing awareness is the work shadow initiative, which allows people to understand fully what is involved in being part of public bodies. That is why I have launched today an Executive initiative that is designed to encourage a more diverse range of people to come forward for public appointments. I have written to 60 organisations seeking their involvement and assistance in enabling people to work shadow those serving on our public bodies, which will allow the shadows to get an understanding of the role that is played by people on public bodies. We intend to have at least 100 shadows by the end of the process.

The initiative follows on from our successful previous tranche of shadows, when people got the chance to see at the coalface what those valued members of our community do in contributing to Scottish people's lives. I hope that the shadows will come forward for public office.

Older People

21. Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive what action it is taking in order to increase physical activity among older people. (S10-5266)

The Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care (Mr Frank McAveety): Older people are encouraged and supported to be physically active through programmes operating at both national and local levels. Across Scotland, NHS boards and local authorities provide wide-ranging opportunities for older people to take part in health-enhancing physical activity, tailored to the specific needs of the individual.

Robert Brown: Is the minister aware of the view of the physical activity task force that approximately half of all falls among older people are caused by the lack of sufficient activity and balanced exercise? Will he increase that sort of activity for older people, as it brings about major benefits for their health and independence?

Mr McAveety: I welcome Robert Brown's

contribution on this issue. The task force will report in June with a series of recommendations. The key issue is how we will address those recommendations. We will need to provide increased activity for the elderly and a variety of activities that includes interesting and powerful pursuits for those who want them.

John Young (West of Scotland) (Con): In view of the fact that people are living much longer—and looking much younger, I may say—I suggest that more vigorous forms of exercise be introduced, such as dancing or things of that nature.

Mr McAveety: John, are you asking?

In terms of musical metaphors, I know that John Young would have preferred the Rufus Thomas hit from the 1960s "Walking the Dog".

A range of activities are being engaged in throughout Scotland. We will await the task force's recommendations, but there is already good practice throughout Scotland. I encourage any member from the Borders who considers themselves to be in the active elderly age range—I name no names and do not identify anyone in particular—to use, for example, the "Guid Fettle" project, which targets individuals over the age of 50 for activity sessions. I recommend that.

Ms Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (SNP): No cheers, thank you, Presiding Officer.

I ask the minister to pay attention to what Robert Brown said about the physical activity task force, which is brimful of ideas, but needs a bit of money. I suggest to the minister that it is not enough to wait until people are elderly to tell them that they must exercise. Some of the budget could be used now to inform companies what they must do to encourage their workers to take exercise where they are working.

I will see you in the gym later, minister.

Mr McAveety: Two offers in the one day is not bad for me. If we had all had physical education teachers as glamorous as Margo MacDonald, perhaps we would have taken more interest in PE. [MEMBERS: "Sook!"] On the serious content of Margo MacDonald's contribution, a range of strategies should be adopted. Someone from a teaching background, such as Margo MacDonald, knows that there are different ways of identifying starting activities for people. I recommend that we take that point on board. I am sure that the task force's recommendations will identify the fact that the issue is not specifically about those who want active sports lifestyles and that there are many ways in which people can have active lifestyles.

During the week, Channel 4 ran a major news piece on the elderly that featured an elderly woman who was involved in karate and judo. I suggest that Margo MacDonald take up those activities.

First Minister's Question Time

Cabinet (Meetings)

1. Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP): To ask the First Minister what issues will be discussed at the next meeting of the Scottish Executive's Cabinet. (S1F-1928)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): I take this opportunity, because I might not get another, to thank the people of Aberdeen for their hospitality this week. They have celebrated our presence well and we have enjoyed being here. They have taken the opportunity to meet MSPs and to put their case, promoting the city and the north-east of Scotland. I only wish that we had a chance to come back some time.

After this week, the Cabinet will meet to discuss matters of importance to the whole of Scotland.

Mr Swinney: I thank the First Minister for his answer and associate the SNP with his remarks about the warm and hospitable welcome that we have had in Aberdeen.

On 28 February, the First Minister said:

"Waiting times are what matter to people. That's what NHS staff tell me. That's what patients tell me."

I ask the First Minister, have waiting times gone up or down?

The First Minister: The longest waiting times have gone down and it is right and proper that that has happened. We said that waiting times were the number 1 priority in our health service and they will remain the number 1 priority.

Mr Swinney: The First Minister has given, as usual, a terribly selective answer. On 28 February, he said:

"Waiting times are what matter to people ... To make a real difference, we will bring down waiting times."

In June 1999, when that crowd came into office, the time between being referred to hospital by a general practitioner and receiving treatment was 76 days. A year later, it was 79 days. A year after that, it was 82 days. Now, it is a staggering 96 days—three weeks longer than in 1999. Can the First Minister say why his Government is forcing people to wait three weeks longer for their treatment than they would have done previously?

The First Minister: As ever, those are selective statistics that have been presented negatively by Mr Swinney and the SNP. In recent years, there have been a number of changes that the chamber has recognised as being particularly important. *[Laughter.]* I hear laughter from the SNP members, but I think that it was a scandal that, for at least 20 years in Scotland, junior doctors were, at times, working 80 or 90 hours a week. It was

time that that practice was ended and that we ensured that junior doctors worked humane hours that were safer for patients.

That and other changes have been introduced in recent years and it is a tribute to every member of the health service staff in Scotland that waiting lists are down again this month, as are the waiting times for the patients who have waited the longest. The chamber should mark those achievements, not criticise them.

Mr Swinney: Once again, the First Minister is ducking and diving on the issue of health statistics. In August 2001, the Executive told us that, for the first time, waiting times would be the

"litmus test of NHS performance".

At the time, people waited 82 days between being referred to hospital by a GP and receiving treatment; now, they wait 96 days. Despite the fact that waiting times have been the Government's primary focus and everything has been invested in trying to get them down, they have gone up. Does the First Minister accept, based on objective analysis—the statistics that I have used today are not mine, but his—that he has failed Scotland on health?

The First Minister: I do not accept that. In February, I said that waiting lists had been our target. It is a significant achievement in our national—

Members: Waiting times!

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): Order.

The First Minister: I said that waiting lists—

Members: Waiting times!

The Presiding Officer: Order.

The First Minister: I said in February that the waiting list target would be achieved and it was. It was achieved by the hard work of doctors and nurses throughout Scotland. Mr Swinney has not taken the opportunity in his three questions to congratulate them on that achievement. He is to be condemned for that.

We have said that those who wait longest want their waiting times to be brought down most quickly. If any of the members who have been shouting visited hospitals and spoke to nurses, doctors and patients, they would know that that is the case and is indeed what has been happening in the past six months.

I take the acute trust in Mr Swinney's Tayside constituency as an example. In that trust, the median waiting time—*[Interruption.]* I tell those members who are not mathematicians that the median is not an average; it is a middle. *[MEMBERS: "Poor Jack."]* SNP members should not enjoy what I am saying too much, because they

will not enjoy what they have to hear. The median waiting time for people in that trust area has increased by eight days, but the number of patients on the waiting list who wait more than six months has reduced by 18 per cent. That has happened in Tayside, which Mr Swinney represents in the Parliament. It is a significant achievement for the health service in Tayside and should be commended. That kind of reduction has been the Executive's priority.

Mr Swinney: The First Minister talks about my visits to hospitals. The last time that I visited a hospital, a nurse said to me, "The problem for us has been that this Government has had us focused on a bogus waiting list target that has undermined clinical priorities." The Executive has now realised that waiting times matter, but it has delivered an increase in waiting times. The First Minister asks who cannot count. He is the one who cannot count: waiting times are going up in Scotland.

The First Minister: I am stunned that Mr Swinney can be so negative on a day on which there is such good news for the health service in Scotland. The national statistics that were published this morning show that, for the first time, everyone in Scotland who was guaranteed to be seen within 12 months was seen within 12 months. The statistics show that the longest waiting times are down consistently throughout Scotland and that our waiting lists are also down—they are down considerably more than anyone predicted and against the predictions of the Opposition parties.

The Opposition parties condemned the introduction of the national waiting times unit. They even tried to prevent new hospitals from being built by opposing the use of public-private partnerships. The Government is delivering on the national health service: we ensure that the facilities are in place and that the priorities are right. As waiting times come down after the waiting lists, we will see the real improvements that patients in Scotland want.

Prime Minister (Meetings)

2. David McLetchie (Lothians) (Con): To ask the First Minister when he will next meet the Prime Minister and what issues he plans to raise. (S1F-1933)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): I expect to see the Prime Minister at the jubilee concert in London on Monday night. At that event, I intend to congratulate him on his support for our bid for Euro 2008.

David McLetchie: In addition, I suppose that the First Minister and the Prime Minister will compare notes on how to make transport ministers

resign. Once they have got past that, I hope that they will discuss issues of importance, such as health, to which Mr Swinney referred. That would be appropriate, given the First Minister's announcement in his statement this morning of a forthcoming white paper on health reform and given the failure to perform on many key indicators, which has been discussed in exchanges today.

The white paper is badly needed, but what proposals will it contain to make a difference and improve median waiting times, which are the times within which in-patients and out-patients get to see a hospital doctor? Those are the statistics and the performance indicators on which the Executive is failing and we would be interested to know what will be in the white paper that will make a difference to them.

The First Minister: Mr McLetchie can expect to know that when the white paper is published, but I assure him that we will not wait until then to take action on waiting times. The action that has already begun will continue, expand and be improved on. As waiting times are now a clear priority for the health service in Scotland, work to reduce them throughout Scotland will continue in the months to come and will not wait for the white paper to be published in the winter.

David McLetchie: I will suggest some matters that the white paper might consider, such as some of the ideas that his Labour colleague Mr Milburn is pursuing and adopting down south. Those ideas include foundation hospitals, to which my colleague Mary Scanlon referred, new management contracts for hospitals that are underperforming and a proper partnership with the independent sector. If Mr Milburn can see all the virtues and benefits of Conservative policies and ideas on how to run a health service, why cannot the First Minister and his head-in-the-sand Minister for Health and Community Care see them, too?

The First Minister: The solutions that are appropriate in Scotland are different from those that are appropriate in England. That is rightly and properly the case. Mr McLetchie mocked the national waiting times unit, which was set up in January, as insufficient, but 4,000 people have already received operations as a result of the actions of that unit, some in the public sector and some in the private sector. That action is taking place across Scotland. It is bringing down not only waiting lists, but the longest waiting times. The action is important. It is appropriate for the Scottish health service and we intend to see it through.

David McLetchie: Is not the truth of the matter that the Executive is rather clueless on all the key issues? The First Minister said that he had all the

answers on education, but now he is having a great debate to find them out; the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Bill has been introduced in order to deal with youth crime, but the First Minister is now setting up a Cabinet committee to review the issue; and the people who told us in 1997 that we had only 48 hours in which to save the national health service are now, five years on, proposing a white paper on health reform. Is not that the ultimate admission of failure? Is not that just another way of saying that we have had five wasted years and that it is now time to go back to the drawing board?

The First Minister: Three distortions in one question is difficult to achieve. Mr McLetchie knows that the health budget will increase by 50 per cent over the next five years. We therefore need to consider carefully how to get the maximum benefit from that new investment. He knows that we have already published a strategy on youth crime, which is being implemented across Scotland but which needs to be developed. He knows that the biggest-ever programme of reform and modernisation of Scotland's education services is already in place. That programme is working, meeting deadlines month after month. The national debate is about a period much beyond that.

There are important developments for the health service. As I said, we have the lowest waiting lists that there have been in Scotland for some considerable time. For the longest waits, we also have the lowest waiting times that we have had in Scotland for some considerable time. The 12-month guarantee that I mentioned is being met right across Scotland, by board after board. The health service in Scotland is making those improvements. The doctors and nurses deserve our congratulations on that and we will ensure that the improvements are developed further still.

Scottish Prison Service Estates Review

3. Stewart Stevenson (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): To ask the First Minister how many responses to the Scottish Prison Service estates review have been received by the service. (S1F-1932)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): Eighty-eight responses were received by 27 May 2002.

Stewart Stevenson: I take this opportunity to thank the First Minister, the Minister for Justice and Richard Simpson, the Deputy Minister for Justice, for their courtesy in giving up some of their time today to see the campaigners for Her Majesty's Prison Peterhead. I extend those thanks to members from all parties. Eighty-eight is a substantial number of responses and we still have a little time to run. Do those responses indicate a

range of options that we can set against those of the Scottish Prison Service? Will the First Minister be minded to consider seriously any alternatives to the current proposals?

The First Minister: I am serious about every consultation exercise that we engage in and I am absolutely committed to studying the outcome of the consultation on the prison estates, just as I am committed to studying the outcome of consultation on any other matter. We will indeed take on board the comments and suggestions that are made during the consultation and we will consider them carefully before coming to our conclusions.

Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab): Is the First Minister aware that a number of Labour members have met representatives of the Prison Officers Association Scotland, who have made clear their willingness to be involved in progressing the reform and investment that is needed in our prison estate? Does he agree that, if the estates review is to deliver a prison estate that is fit for the 21st century, there must be full and genuine consultation between the SPS, the prison officers and the trade unions?

The First Minister: I certainly support full and genuine consultation in the Prison Service. I urge the POAS, if it believes that it has alternative proposals that can bridge the funding gap that we have identified, to make those proposals to us clearly. If the POAS is willing to make the reforms that might help to bridge the funding gap and to achieve the objectives that we have set, we will certainly be interested to hear from its representatives.

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): The Executive took two and a half years to come up with the estates review but there were only 12 weeks for consultation. Will the minister consider extending the consultation period, within which the Justice 1 Committee is finding it difficult to work?

The First Minister: I believe that the fact that there was a long period between the initial suggestion of a review and the publication of the review means that people have a good idea of what they want to say during the consultation period. The consultation period of 12 weeks is normal for such an exercise. It is important for us to bring the matter to a conclusion. It is therefore important to complete the consultation period, to consider the consultation responses and to come to our decisions, as we intend to do.

Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con): Have there been any responses from communities that are keen to have the sex offenders institution sited among them? If not, does not the First Minister think that the people of Peterhead's acceptance of the institution is valuable and that we should retain the institution there?

The First Minister: I do not know whether any of the responses that we have received have demanded to have a sex offenders institution in a town or community anywhere in Scotland. I am not aware of any such response having been submitted but, if one has been submitted, we will obviously consider it.

On Peterhead prison, detailed and serious consideration is needed of the merits of all the aspects of the case that has been made in the prison estates review. That is not just about the location. It is about the programmes that take place in the prison and about ensuring that the buildings are in a fit condition for the 21st century. I hope that those who are submitting responses are taking all those factors into account. I hope that they are making reasonable submissions that we can read with care. We will make our final decisions having listened to all those who have become involved.

Maureen Macmillan (Highlands and Islands (Lab)): Is the First Minister aware of Aberdeenshire Council's proposals for rebuilding Peterhead prison on the same site through a private build, public operate option, which it discussed with members at a reception yesterday? The council believes that that option will be a viable alternative to refurbishing the existing prison. Will the First Minister ensure that those plans are given due consideration in the prison estates review?

The First Minister: I am happy to confirm that all serious submissions will be duly considered in the prison estates review.

Young People (Community Integration)

4. Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab): To ask the First Minister what policies and programmes the Scottish Executive has that will help ensure that young people are fully integrated into their communities. (S1F-1943)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): We have a number of such programmes in education, health and social justice. Those include the changing children's services fund, the better neighbourhood services fund, new community schools and the walk the talk initiative, which involves young people in the development of appropriate and accessible health care. In addition, we have supported the Scottish youth parliament, Young Scot, which is Scotland's first interactive youth portal, the dialogue youth project and the consultation toolkit "Re:action".

Cathy Peattie: Does the First Minister accept that the bad press that young people have had recently does little to promote their inclusion? Will he give a clear commitment to involving young people in finding solutions to the problems that they face?

The First Minister: It is critical that we involve young people in determining those solutions and that young people feel that they can take part in action afterwards. The engagement of young people in our society should be a priority for politicians of all parties. We certainly intend to build on and see through the initiatives that I outlined. We also intend to encourage more and more young people to get involved as the years go by, so that there is a turnover of young people and the initiatives do not die.

Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP): Is the First Minister aware that even a quick glance at social inclusion partnership expenditure for youth projects shows an underspend of more than £0.5 million over the first two years of their operation? In Moray alone, SIPs have underspent by 77 per cent of the budget. Will the First Minister guarantee—unlike the Minister for Social Justice, who merely fudged about flexibility—that the £9.6 million underspend on SIPs will be spent on deprived areas, rather than being shifted into other budgets for new announcements?

The First Minister: One of the key aspects of our proposals for local funding, whether for social inclusion partnerships, local authorities or other bodies, is that those bodies will be able to make decisions for the long term, rather than just spending money willy-nilly at the end of a financial year to meet a budget target. That situation seems to be welcomed by people throughout Scotland. It is easy for Ms Fabiani to make jibes about whether someone has made a guarantee about money being used in years to come. That is not the point; the point is that the money needs to be used in the most effective way—it needs to be best used on the best projects to best effect. That is exactly what we will seek to achieve.

Common Fisheries Policy

5. Tavish Scott (Shetland) (LD): To ask the First Minister what steps the Scottish Executive has taken to ensure that the interests of the fishing industry are properly recognised by the European Commission's proposals for reform of the common fisheries policy. (S1F-1934)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): We helped to shape United Kingdom thinking on reform of the common fisheries policy and I am pleased that many Executive priorities are reflected in the Commission's formal proposals.

Tavish Scott: On the European Commission consultation that was announced on Tuesday, does the First Minister acknowledge the importance in the review of maintaining the Shetland box, the six and 12-mile limits and relative stability against the attacks of the so-called friends-of-fish countries in the European Union? Will he ensure that the 20 per cent

reduction in fishing vessel capacity in Scotland that has already been achieved through decommissioning will be our fleet's contribution to cuts in capacity? Will he agree to work to attract the European fisheries research institute not just to Scotland, but to its natural home in the middle of the Atlantic and the North sea, Shetland?

The First Minister: I clearly cannot give any guarantee about the research institute, but I am aware of the good work that takes place at the North Atlantic Fisheries College. Last year, the college assisted in ensuring that substantial Executive investment—£27 million—went towards best use right across Scotland.

It is important that such investment is not lost under the current proposals. I am delighted to confirm that I understand that the decommissioning that has taken place in Scotland over the past 12 months will be included as part of the overall decommissioning that is required by the European Union. If that is confirmed, it will be very good news for the Scottish fishing industry. I hope that the contribution that the Scottish fishing industry has made over the past 12 months will see the industry through to better times in the longer term.

Richard Lochhead (North-East Scotland) (SNP): After the damage that has been caused by 20 years of the common fisheries policy, I am sure that all parties and the First Minister welcome the CFP's new emphasis on decentralisation, creating a level playing field and long-term planning for Europe's fishing fleets. Does the First Minister share the SNP's view that the proposed regional advisory councils should be more than just talking shops? Does he also agree that any remaining question marks about Scotland's historic fishing rights—such question marks still exist in the new proposals—should be removed immediately? Will he stand up for Scotland's fishing communities during the crucial months ahead by demanding that Scotland leads the UK delegation at the next EU fisheries council?

The First Minister: The member should not try to win cheap publicity when he knows the facts. Mr Lochhead knows well that Scotland has led the fisheries delegation on a number of occasions, that the regional bodies are very much part of the strategy and that we have been putting the case inside the EU for more regional management in the implementation of EU policies.

Mr Lochhead is also well aware that the proposals that the Executive and the Parliament—through its committees—put forward were the proposals that were adopted by the UK and that were won in the Council of the European Union. I remember Mr Lochhead saying at the time that, rather than working through the United Kingdom on such matters, we should go it alone. He fails to

appreciate that, if his proposals to cut Scotland's representation for the fishing industry in the Council from 10 votes to three were implemented, Scotland's influence would be diminished. It is only through the power of the argument from Scotland and the influence of the United Kingdom that Scotland's fishermen have got such a good deal. The deal is a good one and we will protect it.

Ben Wallace (North-East Scotland) (Con): Will the First Minister give a commitment that he will not support the unfair and disproportionate cuts to the Scottish fishing fleet in the European Commission's proposals? Although those proposals will result in the Scottish fleet being reduced by 23 per cent, Spain will have to suffer cuts of only 9.4 per cent.

The First Minister: I do not think that Ben Wallace has given an accurate representation of the proposals. Mr Finnie will announce our full response to the proposals in June.

Dr Winnie Ewing (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): My memory on fishing goes back quite a long time. I remind the First Minister of the successful visits that Mr McLeish made to Europe ahead of the establishment of the Scottish Parliament. Like other ministers, Mr McLeish gave an assurance that, where the Scottish interest dominated, any delegation and negotiation would be led by the Scottish minister. Has the policy changed? Does the First Minister simply want to ridicule my position because I am a Scottish nationalist? Has he no concern for the fishermen? I have dedicated my life to the fishermen and care passionately about their right to survive. The First Minister should answer that question. He should say that he will seek to lead the delegation.

The First Minister: If Mrs Ewing has paid attention to the Parliament over these past three years, she will know that we have regularly led that delegation and that Mr Finnie himself has led it. I can tell members one thing: I would rather have Ross Finnie sitting in the European Council with 10 votes at his disposal than Richard Lochhead sitting there with three. We want to ensure that Scotland has the maximum influence in the European Union. We get that influence by the power of our argument and by the votes of the United Kingdom. That is the way in which to deliver Scotland's priorities, which is what we will continue to do.

Richard Lochhead: On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

The Presiding Officer: I suspect that it is a point of argument, but I shall hear it.

Richard Lochhead: Presiding Officer, should not Parliament be informed why the Minister for Environment and Rural Development, Ross Finnie, answered in response to a parliamentary

question that the Scottish Executive has not led any fisheries councils in Europe?

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

Iain Smith (North-East Fife) (LD): While welcoming the general direction of the Commission's proposals for the reform of the common fisheries policy, does the First Minister agree that one size does not fit all? Is not it important that we involve fishermen, such as those from Pittenweem in my constituency, in developing the management of their fisheries? That would help to ensure the sustainable future of fisheries such as the prawn fishery off the east neuk of Fife.

The First Minister: Just as we advocate more regional management of the European common fisheries policy, we believe that it is right to take account of the different local areas within Scotland. I hear what Iain Smith has said about his constituency.

European Football Championships 2008

6. Mr David Davidson (North-East Scotland) (Con): To ask the First Minister what support the Scottish Executive will give to building a new sports stadium in the Aberdeen area so that the economy in the north-east could benefit from a successful bid to host the European football championships in 2008. (S1F-1924)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): The Scottish Executive will agree firm support for whatever two stadia are selected with the Scottish Football Association and the Irish Government. Given the fact that we are in Aberdeen, we should today welcome the support of Alex Ferguson, who was Aberdeen's best-ever football ambassador, for the bid. The case for our European bid is building momentum all the time. Alex Ferguson's support will be welcomed here in Aberdeen and throughout Scotland.

Mr Davidson: The First Minister should know that the proposed site for the Aberdeen stadium has no transport infrastructure to support it. As we are in Aberdeen, will he today give Aberdeen a commitment that the new western bypass will be built in time for the football championship so that we can benefit from it?

The First Minister: I must be careful about what I say because, as this is a planning matter, we cannot be seen to prejudge the situation. However, my understanding is that the proposal for a new stadium in Aberdeen is linked to proposed transport improvements, which is welcome. It is important that we continue to work with the local partnership to improve the transport infrastructure around Aberdeen and in the north-east of Scotland. We intend to do that. Indeed, Lewis Macdonald yesterday announced additional

support for the partnership.

Irene McGugan (North-East Scotland) (SNP): I remind the First Minister that he agreed a few months ago that the bid should be an all-party one. Where is the evidence of that in the signatures on the bid document?

The First Minister: The leaders of the Opposition parties will confirm that, when we signed the bid in Stockholm recently, we had letters from the other parties to ensure that the fact that our bid had cross-party support at leadership level in the Parliament was transmitted to the Union of European Football Associations authorities. I stressed the cross-party support when I met those authorities around the time of the champions league final. It is right and proper that the bid document contains signatures of people from a variety of backgrounds. Politicians are important, but they will not be the sole determinant of any decision by UEFA. The decision to include celebrities, business people and sports people is right and proper.

Occasionally, members in the chamber go for cheap headlines—sometimes in the Sunday newspapers—by attacking and demeaning the bid and the investment that it will bring to Scotland. That is wrong. We have to unite in the chamber and across Scotland. That will be the only way of achieving success with the bid.

The Presiding Officer: That brings us to the end of question time.

Richard Lochhead (North-East Scotland) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I believe that it was Jim Wallace, the minister responsible for external relations, who recently gave a written parliamentary answer saying that Scotland had led at only three EU councils, on education and health topics. Is it not therefore the case that, when the First Minister told the Parliament that we had led at EU fisheries councils, he was misleading Parliament?

Dr Winnie Ewing (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): He told a lie.

The Presiding Officer: Order. That is not a point of order. The content of ministerial answers is not a matter for the chair.

Richard Lochhead: Well, how do we get any redress?

The Presiding Officer: Order. It is a point of argument; it is not a point of order for me in the chair.

Ms Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (SNP): On a point of order.

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

The Presiding Officer: Is it the same one or a different one?

Alex Neil: We have had two replies on the same subject from two ministers. Those replies contradict each other, so one minister, by definition, must be misleading Parliament. That is not a point of argument; it is a point of order.

The Presiding Officer: It is for me to judge whether it is a point of order. It is not; it is a point of argument. Ms MacDonald, is your point of order on the same topic? I hope not.

Ms MacDonald: Further to that point of order, Presiding Officer, if it is shown that a minister inadvertently, or otherwise, has misled Parliament, is it not in order for that minister to correct that at the same meeting?

The Presiding Officer: It is always open to ministers to correct things if they wish, but that is not a point of order for the chair. Let us move on to the next debate.

The First Minister: On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

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

The First Minister: It is. The topic is close to the hearts of people who, because we are so close to home for them in the north-east, are, I am sure, listening avidly to our proceedings today. It is important to clarify my responses to previous questions. I said—I hope very clearly—that Ross Finnie had led in the delegation at the Council of the European Union. That was a quite deliberate choice of phrase. Ross Finnie has led the delegation in the Council—led for the United Kingdom to ensure that our representations were put forward very clearly. That may be a technical difference from what was said in an answer that the Deputy First Minister recently gave, which was phrased in another way. However, it is, I believe, an absolutely accurate statement.

The Presiding Officer: That is all very important, but it is still not a point of order.

Cancer Strategy

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): We come now to a debate on motion S1M-3160, in the name of Malcolm Chisholm, on implementing the cancer strategy. I invite those who wish to take part in the debate to indicate that wish now. Those who are not staying should leave quickly and quietly.

15:34

The Minister for Health and Community Care (Malcolm Chisholm): The cancer strategy is a major programme of investment and reform that covers staffing, diagnosis, treatment and palliative care, prevention, screening, information technology and research. Its starting point is a recognition of problems, since we cannot fix what we do not acknowledge.

The strategy targets those problems through a combination of substantial investment and new ways of working. The first £10 million of additional investment announced last November was earmarked for more than 130 extra staff and for investment in vital equipment such as scanners. In February, I announced £2 million extra specifically for the Beatson. Last week, I gave details of a further £13 million of dedicated investment across Scotland. That is £25 million for the cancer strategy, monitored and reported on at regular intervals, over and above the mainstream cancer budgets and the cancer equipment programmes that have been running through the lifetime of the Scottish Parliament. That investment has been welcomed widely, beyond the shores of Scotland as well as within Scotland. It has been welcomed because the money is ring fenced and because decisions about the investment priorities are being made by front-line staff.

This year's investment will result in 17 more consultants, 50 more nurses, 37 cancer nurse specialists, 14 more radiographers and 84 further dedicated staff, including pharmacists, technicians and other support staff. There will also be additional investment in vital cancer equipment across the country. For example, in Grampian, there will be endoscopy equipment to develop an outreach colorectal diagnostic service. In Edinburgh there will be a magnetic resonance imaging scanner, which will increase the capacity of the service and so reduce waiting times. In the west of Scotland there will be equipment for the provision of photodynamic therapy to improve equity of access for patients and to provide an alternative to surgery.

Brian Adam (North-East Scotland) (SNP): I am pleased to hear about the equipment. I hope that on this occasion, unlike when the minister's

predecessor announced five new MRI scanners, the minister has taken the trouble to ask the service what it wants.

Malcolm Chisholm: We have not only asked the service what it wants—the service has decided what it wants. If Brian Adam had been listening, he would know that we are making the investment in a completely new way, which is why it has been welcomed not just in Scotland but in England and further afield. I also point out that running costs of the MRI scanner are included in the investment.

I announced money for the Beatson earlier in the year in order that extra staff could be recruited as quickly as possible. Last week I paid a visit to the Beatson six months after my initial visit. Members will know of the action that we took in December and that we have invested £500,000 in improving the buildings and in securing more space at Gartnavel. I hope that members also know that we have announced funding for the new west of Scotland cancer centre at Gartnavel.

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab): Will the minister confirm that, on our joint visit to the Beatson last week, nursing staff said that they were delighted by the positive signs in nurse recruitment? Will he also confirm that the fact that some of our new oncologists, such as Jim Cassidy, chose the Beatson over other leading cancer centres, shows that important progress has been made in making the Beatson a leading cancer centre in the world?

Malcolm Chisholm: I agree with Pauline McNeill. Indeed, at a conference that I attended in Aberdeen this morning, Jim Cassidy spoke very highly of what was happening, despite having been until recently a critic of cancer services in Scotland.

Pauline McNeill mentioned the Beatson nurses. We have recruited 35 additional nurses for the Beatson. The sceptics said that it was all very well for us to announce posts, but asked how we were going to fill them. I can tell members that most of those posts have been filled already. We also announced posts for medical oncologists, radiographers and other support staff and we believe that we will be able to recruit them at the Beatson.

Just as we faced up to the problems at the Beatson, so we are willing to face up to the wider problems that have been highlighted by the Clinical Standards Board for Scotland's reports on cancer services. We are committed to transparency and a culture of improvement. That is why we decided to obtain information about cancer services everywhere in Scotland and it is why we shall act on the reports. Patients are involved all the way in the reports of the Clinical Standards Board. Patients are also involved in the

planning groups, making decisions about investment and the reorganisation of services.

I cannot go over everything that the Clinical Standards Board's reports mentioned, but one recommendation was that we need to have better referral protocols to ensure consistency of referral patterns and patient pathways. That would avoid delays in patients being seen for the first time or on subsequent occasions. I am pleased to confirm that referral guidance prepared by a multidisciplinary working group of the Scottish Cancer Group has been published today and can be found on the "Cancer in Scotland" website. All of the information about last week's investment decisions can be found on that website and it is worth reading.

This morning I was pleased to visit the north-east Scotland cancer co-ordinating and advisory group conference. I was also pleased that Shona Robison and Nicola Sturgeon were there, although they heard a slightly different part of the programme. At the conference, we saw front-line staff leading change. That is the way in which the cancer strategy is being carried out in Scotland.

There was a lot of information at the conference about the development of tumour-specific groups in the north-east, managed clinical networks, redesign of services and the development of outreach services, as well as about the increase in capacity because of the recent investment. There was also a lot of emphasis on the importance of IT, which is something that I have highlighted in recent debates on investment and reform in health. I was pleased that the north cancer group decided to invest some of the new money in clinical audit IT.

It is a challenge to recruit staff in the face of UK and international shortages in some specialist fields such as radiology and pathology as well as diagnostic and therapeutic radiography. The Executive acknowledges that challenge and is planning to set up three regional work force planning and development centres to work with the NHS to help maximise the use of resources across health care services, and to plan better in order to meet demands across regional areas and networks, not just within specific hospitals or other health care settings—[*Interruption.*] I will not have time to take an intervention because I have only three minutes left. That will be part of a wider action plan on work force planning and development that we will bring out in a few weeks' time. The Temple report, to which I referred at question time, will drive work forward on increasing the medical work force. That will include an international dimension. I suspect that Nicola Sturgeon might mention that in her speech.

I am pleased to see the way in which the money announced in last week's plans is being used to

develop innovative ways of maximising the available resource. For example, Grampian plans to pilot extending the role of biomedical scientists into pathology so that the best use can be made of a scarce resource. There is also an excellent example in Aberdeen and North of Scotland of a diagnostic facility for rural Grampian that will allow patients to be diagnosed earlier and closer to home. We are seeing services being redesigned in various parts of Scotland. That is also part of the answer to staffing difficulties, particularly in specialties, which is something that I certainly recognise and on which we are acting.

I shall not be accepting the Scottish National Party's amendment. I do not believe that the staffing difficulties stop front-line staff being involved in deciding investment priorities and leading change. As I have indicated, I have specific initiatives in train and others will follow the Temple report and the action plan on work force planning and development that will come out next month. However, I can assure members that we will not include the SNP policy of enhanced pay for one particular specialty or location. That would create new recruitment difficulties by draining staff from other services or parts of the country. That SNP core policy on staff is not in the interests of either staff or patients.

I am into the last minute of my speech so I cannot say as much about screening, prevention and research as I wanted to do. I remind members of the recent announcement of £2.75 million for liquid-based cytology for cervical screening. The breast screening age is being extended to 70 in the next couple of years. Here in Grampian and elsewhere in Scotland there is a colorectal screening pilot. The final evaluation will be next year, but early indications are that that is proving to be successful.

Prevention will involve action on smoking and diet. That action is being taken, and more will be announced soon. It will also involve physical activity. Next week will see the publication of the important report from the physical activity task force. Because my time is almost up, I mention in passing the £1 million we have put into clinical trials this year. That has been widely welcomed by the cancer world and by patients.

I have indicated how even previous critics of the Government are welcoming the approach that we are adopting to cancer in Scotland. Professor Gordon McVie, who has been extremely critical of cancer strategy in Scotland and England, said at a recent conference on cancer and diet that we were now making significant progress and going about it in the right way. I do not say that in any way to be complacent—I end where I began, by acknowledging the problems that we have—but we have set in train the action and the processes

that can deal with those problems in a sustained and sustainable manner.

I move,

That the Parliament acknowledges the problems highlighted by the recent Clinical Standards Board for Scotland reports on cancer services; welcomes the Cancer Strategy and the significant and dedicated resources that have been allocated for its implementation; supports the key role of front-line staff in deciding investment priorities and leading service change, and looks forward to sustained progress in implementing the strategy and reaching all the Clinical Standards Board for Scotland standards.

15:45

Nicola Sturgeon (Glasgow) (SNP): At the start of this important debate I say that our thoughts, and I am sure the thoughts of everyone in the chamber, are with our colleague Margaret Ewing. We happened to hear from Fergus Ewing today that Margaret is making extremely good progress. We look forward to having her back with us as soon as possible. [*Applause.*]

This is an extremely important debate. As we know, cancer is Scotland's biggest killer. People are more likely to get cancer if they live in Scotland, and they are more likely to die from it as well. Our survival rates are the lowest in the UK, and are among the lowest in Europe. It would be wrong in a debate about cancer not to mention the importance of prevention as well as treatment. Between 80 and 90 per cent of all cancers are preventable. Tobacco causes one in three cases of cancer. That is why sustained and concerted action to tackle smoking, in particular among women and young people, must be at the heart of our efforts to tackle cancer. But we must also work to improve cancer services to ensure speedier diagnosis and better treatment for cancer patients.

The quality of our cancer services still lags behind that of many other countries. We are paying a heavy price for decades of underinvestment in staff and equipment. The crisis at the Beatson brought home to everyone just how bad things had been allowed to become. On the subject of the Beatson, it is appropriate to mention—and mention positively—the action that has been taken to address some of the problems at that centre, but it would be irresponsible not to bring to Parliament's attention some of the lingering concerns that are being expressed by staff who work at the Beatson.

Just yesterday, a senior member of staff voiced the following concerns to me. The expert advisory group report that was published in February recommended the appointment of a full-time medical director for the Beatson, yet no advert has yet been placed for that job. The issue of consultant work load, which in the past has been described as unsafe, has not been adequately

addressed, and staff morale at the Beatson remains low. I raise those issues in the hope that the minister may return to them later or address them now.

Malcolm Chisholm: The medical director post will be advertised in due course, but Adam Bryson will stay there for a little longer. I recognise the problem of consultant work load. Last week, I probably spoke to the same consultant who spoke to Nicola Sturgeon. Clearly, some action has been taken through the reorganisation of clinics—which, I add, Nicola Sturgeon opposed—and that has helped the work load to some extent but, clearly, more action is needed. The recruitment of extra consultants and the money that we have provided for medical oncologists will be particularly helpful.

Nicola Sturgeon: I will come to the issue of recruitment. I welcome the minister's statement. I raise those points not to be negative—I say that genuinely—but to remind us all that we must never again take our eye off the ball, especially with regard to the Beatson. We must make sure that the problems there are sorted once and for all.

While the Beatson continues, for obvious reasons, to grab the headlines, we must remember that cancer services elsewhere also have some catching up to do. An answer that I received this week to a parliamentary question revealed that, by the end of 2002, Scotland will still have only 3.9 linear accelerators per million of our population. The Royal College of Radiologists recommends that there should be five per million. The recent Clinical Standards Board for Scotland report on cancer services noted the inadequate number of linear accelerators in Scotland. That is an indication of how far we still have to go.

Waiting times for diagnosis and treatment are still too long—unacceptably long, according to a recent Clinical Standards Board report. As we all heard last night, we spend less per head on cancer drugs than do other countries—an average of 90p per head in Scotland, compared with £4 or £5 per head in many other parts of Europe. Against that background, I welcome the cancer strategy and the additional ring-fenced cash that has been made available to support the cancer strategy over the next few years.

In the time that remains, I will concentrate on the areas on which more action is urgently required. That is not to say that I think that the action that the minister is taking is wrong, but we must go further on some matters. As we know—the minister referred to the matter—many parts of the service are crippled by staff shortages. There are shortages of radiologists, pathologists, clinical oncologists and specialist nurses.

The conference that the minister and I attended this morning was addressed by a contributor who

talked about the 30 per cent vacancy rate for therapy radiographers. We train only 24 radiographers in Scotland every year, and many of them are being lured away at the end of their training to lucrative posts elsewhere.

As the Royal College of Nursing has said, a limited number of nurses in Scotland have specialist qualifications in cancer nursing, and few educational programmes are available to those who wish to access them. The lead cancer clinician, Anna Gregor, has said that Scotland is running out of specialist cancer nurses. When we read through the Clinical Standards Board's reports, it is impossible not to be struck by the number of identified problems that have their roots in the shortage of specialist staff. That is the core problem in the delivery of cancer services.

The additional posts for consultants, nurses, specialist nurses, radiographers, pharmacists and the like that the additional investment will make possible are good news. I am happy to welcome them. However, in many ways, creating the posts is the easy part. Finding the right people to fill them is much harder.

Even before last week's announcement of additional staff posts, the Beatson had several long-term consultant vacancies. Woefully inadequate work force planning has caused the problem. I welcome the minister's comments about work force planning, but the reality—as the Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care, Mary Mulligan, said at question time—is that it will take years to train the number of specialists that we need. In the short term, we must attract some of the people to fill those posts from elsewhere, whether from south of the border or other countries.

I have argued that if we are to do that more successfully, we must adopt a new approach. Scotland needs a competitive edge in the international labour market. I ask the Minister for Health and Community Care to reconsider using his powers to enhance UK pay and conditions packages to help us to encourage the staff whom we desperately need to work in Scotland rather than elsewhere.

We should aim to be more proactive in recruiting internationally. The Beatson action plan that was published at the end of last year talks of headhunting through established contacts with other European and international centres. I call for the minister to go further and appoint a special envoy—a senior Scottish doctor of international renown—who would be charged with the task of identifying and attracting specialist cancer staff from abroad into Scottish hospitals, to offer them the opportunity and the incentives to work in Scotland, and, in doing so, to help the service to deliver better for our patients. Other countries do

that. We must not lose out.

We need concerted action to deal with the core problem in cancer services. I hope that, in the spirit of consensus that the First Minister talked about this morning, the Minister for Health and Community Care will be willing to listen to those positive and constructive suggestions.

I move amendment S1M-3160.1, to leave out from "supports" to end and insert:

"considers that the staff shortages in cancer services, highlighted in the recent Clinical Standards Board for Scotland reports, restrict the ability of front-line staff to decide investment priorities, lead service change and deliver a first class service for patients, and calls on the Scottish Executive to introduce specific initiatives to tackle these shortages."

15:53

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):

I associate the Conservatives with the comments that have been made about Margaret Ewing. I ask Fergus Ewing to pass on our very best wishes.

As the Scottish Conservative spokeswoman on health and as joint convener, with Kenneth Macintosh, of the cross-party group on cancer, I welcome the debate. I am pleased that Richard Simpson is in the chamber. I pay tribute to his excellent work on the cross-party group before he was appointed as a minister, in particular for his vision and for the success of the whole-day cancer conference in Edinburgh last month. MSPs from all parties attended the conference, which was fully subscribed. Richard Simpson should know that we received several complaints from people who could not obtain tickets. The conference is an example of the achievements of the cross-party groups and of the ability of members to work together, particularly on such important issues as cancer. Well done, Richard.

The motion must be commended for acknowledging the excellent Clinical Standards Board for Scotland reports on cancer services. More money is being spent, but the outcomes show little sign of improvement. I do not want to be negative, as that is not helpful, but I do want to raise one or two points that are made in the report.

At the time of the review, only four trusts were part of the managed clinical networks, which means that not enough lung cancer patients were included in the clinical trials. I hope that the additional money will go towards treating lung cancer patients.

Only one hospital in Scotland met the national guidelines for waiting times. Most trusts were unable to provide the audit data against which performance could be measured. It is difficult to describe cancer services fully until progress is made in that respect.

Given that the cancer plan is not yet one year old, it is early days to judge it. Managed clinical networks take time to put in place and the new money is open to bids, which again takes time. I hope that the bids that are successful are those that will bring the greatest benefit to patients.

The first issue of the *Health and Community Care Journal* states that the overall survival figures for lung cancer have changed little since King George VI died of lung cancer 50 years ago. Our survival figures lag behind those of many European countries and the United States. Only 7 per cent of lung cancer patients in Scotland survive over five years compared with up to 14 per cent in other countries.

It is too early to judge the efficacy of the cancer plan, but I want to highlight concerns that have been raised on the current cancer policy development plan. I am concerned about oral cancer, which is a particular problem in the Highlands and Moray where it is difficult to access an NHS dentist, let alone a private dentist. It is obvious that regular dental check-ups provide dental hygiene benefits, but they are also when the early stages of oral cancer can be detected. Any cancer strategy should support and advise people on access to dentistry.

Concern exists about the lack of inclusion of general practitioners in the cancer strategy, as they have a key role in delivering the strategy. The Royal College of General Practitioners produced a paper, which states:

"there was little in the cancer plan relating specifically to developing services in primary care."

The RCGP is also concerned that less than 4 per cent of the new money is to be targeted at primary care. I hope that the minister's commitment to local health care co-operatives will extend to bringing them into the managed clinical networks.

We expect more nurse specialists, but the Royal College of Nursing has stated that the variation in clinical and educational preparation for the role of clinical nurses is concerning. The RCN has also noted that there is a lack of clarity around the role of cancer nurses. We should not expect nurses to take on more responsibility without giving them the resources, training and support that they need to carry out those functions.

I ask the minister to address in his summing up a point that arises from the figures that were released today. If we compare the most recent figures, which are for March 2002, with those for December 2001, we see that the numbers of emergency in-patients, elective in-patients and day-case patients are down and that the numbers for total out-patients and first out-patients are also down. Why is that? Given that fewer patients were treated in the past three months and that patients

are waiting longer for treatment, how have 8,000 people fallen off the waiting list?

15:59

Mrs Margaret Smith (Edinburgh West) (LD): I am delighted to be able to take part in the debate today in Aberdeen. Over the past few days, the city has given us a great welcome. I want to put on record my thanks for the welcome that I was given by health professionals at the Royal Aberdeen children's hospital and the Aberdeen and north centre for haematology, oncology and radiotherapy at Aberdeen royal infirmary, and by staff and volunteers at the Cancerlink Aberdeen and north support centre and at NHS 24, which I visited with the minister.

Cancer touches the lives of every single Scot. I want to associate myself and my party with the comments that have been made about our colleague Margaret Ewing. Cancer touches the lives of those in the chamber, just as it does the lives of people in every other part of Scotland. We all join in wishing Margaret all the best. We send our good luck to her and best wishes to Fergus and their family.

Currently, one in three of our people will suffer from cancer. Moreover, with the older population set to grow, the incidence of cancer will also grow. However, there are some good signs as far as individual survival rates are concerned, and predictions are generally favourable.

That said, with 15,000 cancer deaths and 26,000 new diagnoses each year, it is clear that fighting cancer and giving Scots the services that they need to live with cancer should be—and is—a priority for the Executive and the Parliament. As a result, I welcome the Executive's extra £60 million over three years for cancer services. I am particularly pleased that the funding is ring fenced. That approach is different from the one that has been taken south of the border.

Decisions about the allocation of resources are quite rightly in the hands of the regional cancer advisory groups and the Scottish Cancer Group with its lead clinician Dr Gregor. Every part of the country has different needs; all parts do not have the same starting point or the same level of need. For example, although we now have three managed clinical network areas, it is clear that the south-east network is more developed than the network in the west. Meanwhile, the west has greater problems with deprivation and the incidence of cancer and it is only right that that is reflected in decisions about resource allocation. On a more parochial point, I welcome the fact that the Western general hospital in my constituency has received a new MRI scanner as a result of last week's allocation of the second tranche of cancer strategy funding.

It is essential that we have the right staff in the right place with the right skills to operate the right equipment to deliver services with the patients' needs in mind. At the cross-party group on cancer's recent conference in Edinburgh, Anna Gregor highlighted a point that was raised with me yesterday at the ANCHOR cancer unit. National shortages in key posts such as radiologists, radiographers, diagnostic specialists and anaesthetists are making it increasingly difficult to recruit the staff necessary to deliver quality services and managed clinical networks based on multidisciplinary working. Although we welcome last week's announcement, which commits us to recruiting more consultants, nurses, cancer specialist nurses, radiographers and ancillary staff, we need the same hands-on approach that the minister took in relation to the problems at the Beatson cancer clinic and aggressive work force planning.

I am heartened by the minister's comments about the three regional work force planning groups, the action plan on work force planning that is in the pipeline and the expected Temple report. That is the key way in which we can tackle the issues, and it is critical that the minister does what he can to ensure that we increase the number of places in our medical schools and address the terrible attrition rate among student nurses, particularly among radiography students. Without aggressive work force planning, we will not be properly equipped to deal with the challenges that lie ahead. Such challenges include improving communication between primary and secondary care; reducing waiting times; establishing, working towards and achieving quality standards linked to guidelines and standards set by the Scottish intercollegiate guidelines network and the Clinical Standards Board for Scotland; and, ultimately, reducing the cancer risk for every Scot.

We welcome the recent reviews of breast, lung, ovarian and colorectal cancer services that the Clinical Standards Board for Scotland has undertaken and the fact that the Executive's realistic motion commits us to sustained progress in reaching all the board's standards. It is a clear sign that the Executive is serious about transparency in NHS cancer services. However, although it is right to focus on what needs to be done, we should not fail to acknowledge the excellent work that is being done day in, day out in our cancer centres, in primary and palliative care and by the voluntary sector and researchers in Scotland.

A key issue highlighted by the reports was the lack of data and proper audit of certain services and the lack of continuity in data collection and use. In some cases, the Clinical Standards Board for Scotland was unable to say, for example, whether waiting time targets for lung cancer had

been reached. Generally speaking, although Scotland has more comprehensive data resources than many other places, it is clear that progress can still be made. I urge the minister to do all that he can to improve the data set through the use of technology such as the electronic clinical communications implementation programme—or ECCI—and other protocols, which will then be able to inform service comparisons, planning and delivery. I also ask the minister to clarify the impact that data protection legislation will have on our ability to use national donor-anonymous data in service planning and so on.

Scotland faces a number of key challenges in relation to cancer, many of which will not be solved by the NHS alone. My colleague George Lyon will touch on some of those issues. Although it is important that we do all that we can about diagnosis and treatment, we must also focus on prevention, health promotion, smoking cessation policies, strategies to tackle poverty and improving research.

I support the Executive's motion. The debate so far has been good. Many of us are ready to work together to improve cancer services. Indeed, I know that the Health and Community Care Committee is looking forward to visiting the Beatson cancer clinic in the next few weeks.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): Eight members want to speak and there are only 23 minutes for the open debate, which will not work, so I suspect that two members will have to drop out. I call Kenneth Macintosh, who has four minutes.

16:05

Mr Kenneth Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): I begin by welcoming the contributions that we have heard so far from members on all sides of the chamber. Politics often involves competing priorities and arguments, but it is unfortunate that the adversarial exchanges at question time and during this morning's debate will almost certainly receive more coverage than the broad-based agreement that all members share in their approach to this important issue.

My interest in cancer came from hearing people's concerns about cancer services. The common thread that ran through all the complaints of the constituents who came to see me was their anger and disappointment at the state of some of our health services. All those individuals were struggling to come to terms with a devastating diagnosis. They then had to cope with the fact that the support was not there when they most needed it or that the treatment that they received failed to match their expectations. I found the stories about waiting most disturbing. They were not only about

waiting times and unacceptable delays in getting diagnosis or treatment. There were stories about waiting around hospitals, sometimes in shabby and depressing rooms, to see a consultant, to get a scan or to get medication—waiting with that horrible anxiety and worry in the pit of the stomach.

As today's motion acknowledges, the cancer strategy cannot solve the many problems that surround existing services—or, at least, not overnight. However, the strategy is a major step forward in helping to identify the areas of concern and getting us to work together on a common agenda to tackle the problems. That is one of the messages that came out of the cross-party group's extremely successful conference on the cancer plan, which Mary Scanlon and Margaret Smith have referred to. So much more needs to be done, but we are on the right tracks. Having said that, I would like to draw the Executive's attention to a number of specific issues that emerged from the conference.

My first point echoes comments made by Nicola Sturgeon. Professor Sir David Lane of Cyclacel in Dundee spoke to the conference about the importance of scientific research. He said that he is always being asked by members of the public, "When are you going to find a cure for cancer?" He replies, "It already exists. Stop smoking." Smoking causes a third of all cancers and 90 per cent of lung cancer. Almost every speaker at the conference repeated that message, and it is a message that we at the Scottish Parliament need to remind ourselves of and address through our public health and education programme.

Patient involvement and patient empowerment are vital to improving treatment and care throughout the health service, and nowhere more so than in cancer services. If we want our doctors to pay greater attention to the views of patients, we must provide evidence that we will improve levels of care by doing so. Many entrenched attitudes must be overcome if we are to move from a doctor-centred health service to a patient-centred one. Perhaps if the Executive were to commission research in that area, we could provide evidence of the improvements that would be forthcoming and give patient advocacy greater weight and credibility among medical professionals.

There is a balance to be struck between central guidance and local control, and I hesitate before whole-heartedly endorsing the sentiments of some in the medical profession who see greater specialisation and centralisation at the expense of local care as the solution. However, in drug and therapy evaluation, the multiplicity of organisations that are involved throughout Scotland does not help to ensure equity, fairness or access to the

best drugs available. Every health board seems to have its own drug evaluation panel, taking decisions that could well be helped by a more co-ordinated, central approach. Again, I urge the Executive to investigate what can be done to reduce that duplication.

Several members have mentioned the most important task facing the Executive—putting in place a better system of planning for staffing needs in cancer services. Trusts are looking for radiotherapists, pathologists, pharmacists and oncologists to fill posts, but they are not there. Strategic planning is needed to get the staff levels and the skills mix right, and the range of jobs must be developed to provide an attractive career structure. That is a long-term task, but the Executive could start with education and training programmes to supplement the recruitment of more specialist cancer nurses.

I will end with a more positive message, which came out of the cross-party group's conference. Dr Mac Armstrong, the chief medical officer, talked of being on the brink of moving from regarding cancer as a death sentence to treating it like any other chronic disease. In fact, the theme of moving from a victim mentality to one of living with cancer was echoed by patient and professional alike. I believe that the cancer strategy has a major role to play in delivering that message, and I endorse the Executive's motion.

16:09

Ms Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP): I thank the Scottish Cancer Group for its input to the cancer strategy document. Reading through it, I find that it gives an honest appraisal of the situation in Scotland. I also praise the dedication of health service staff, who sometimes must work under difficult circumstances.

All of us should welcome any strategy that will result in improvements in the standards of cancer treatment, as much improvement is needed. Tory and Labour Governments cannot be proud of their record. Adrian Harnett is one of the specialists who recently resigned as a result of the crisis at Glasgow's Beatson centre. He accused politicians of always talking about wanting a world-class health service, but delivering the cheapest service that they could get away with.

Politicians have a duty to ensure that action replaces talking and fine words. Mechanisms and finances must be put in place to produce a world-class service, which this country desperately requires. There must be the best possible cancer services and treatment in a country in which one in three men and one in four women will be diagnosed with cancer. Some 25,000 cancer cases are diagnosed and 15,000 people die of

cancer each year—we desperately need improvements.

I am a Glasgow MSP and am deeply aware of my native city's appalling health record. Some 52 of the 90 most deprived postcode areas in Scotland are in Glasgow. The incidence of cancer is higher in Glasgow than it is anywhere else in Scotland—if the Scottish average is taken to be 100, the incidence in Glasgow is 111.2 for men and 107.6 for women. Therefore, it was particularly distressing to follow the catalogue of problems at Glasgow's Beatson centre, which treats 60 per cent of Scotland's cancer sufferers. The centre seemed to go from crisis to crisis. Recently, it was also revealed that Scotland's only centre for eye cancer at Gartnavel hospital was under great pressure as a result of staff shortages. That was a knock-on effect of resignations at the Beatson.

I am grateful that measures are being taken and that there is some investment at last. However, the Executive must ask itself why it has taken so long to act when the warning signs have been clear for many years. We must end the scandal whereby up to half of Scotland's cancer patients do not get to see a cancer specialist. Statistics show that oncologists see only 25 per cent to 50 per cent of patients. We must end the scandal whereby sufferers from bowel cancer commence chemotherapy treatment within the standard eight weeks of surgery at only two out of 34 hospitals in Scotland. We must also end the scandal whereby only three out of 31 hospitals that were visited by the CSBS met the target of making a decision on initial treatment for lung cancer patients within four weeks of diagnosis.

The Executive must take action to end the postcode lottery that means that the length of time that cancer patients must wait for an MRI scan after diagnosis can vary from around seven weeks to a year, depending on where they live. It is a disgrace that, because there is a national shortage, health boards do not have enough trained staff.

We must provide sufficient specialist cancer doctors and more specialist nurses. The SNP's proposals, which Nicola Sturgeon announced today, would go a long way towards addressing the shortages. The Executive and the Labour party have promised much in respect of the health service, but the debate has shown that they have failed to deliver. We welcome anything, but action should have been taken much sooner.

The health service requires resources to bring it up to 21st century standards. There should be no spin or paper to cover the cracks of failed policies.

I said that the announcement of more moneys is welcome. It is a start, but action must be taken as

soon as possible. We must consider patients—they do not have time to wait.

16:14

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): I want to draw members' attention to cancer care services in the west of Scotland and their effect on Ayrshire patients. It is to be regretted that the Beatson centre, which Mary Scanlon and I visited before Christmas, has been described as being like a hospital in a third-world country. The staff are magnificent, but they have fought a losing battle to provide adequate cancer care for the 60 per cent of Scotland's population that is served by the Beatson centre.

When Adrian Harnett resigned before Christmas, Ayrshire lost 50 per cent of its breast cancer treatment capability. Scotland completely lost its ability to treat eye cancers. Why did he resign? He resigned because, for two years, he could not get secretarial assistance to type up his notes. For two years, Adrian Harnett, who is recognised worldwide for his talent and who had several job offers on his desk on the evening of the day on which he resigned, had to do his own note-taking and paperwork because the North Glasgow University Hospitals NHS Trust could not or would not give him the secretarial back-up for which he continually asked. It is a huge understatement to say that that is shocking and depressing.

So that it can function properly, the Beatson oncology unit requires about 23 oncologists. At that time, it had only 15 and a half full-time equivalent oncologists. Regrettably, the situation is now little better, although it is improving and soon there will be 17 and a half full-time oncologists in place. In addition, two more full-time palliative care oncologists have been invited to join the staff.

I commend Adam Bryson, the new director of the centre. Although he is fighting manfully to restore the centre's capability and reputation, it is not yet out of the woods. The extra £2 million that the Beatson was given in February has not thus far made a difference. My constituents in Ayrshire who suffer from cancer must now travel to clinics that used to be held in Ayrshire. The clinical care network is a shadow of its former self because of a lack of staff.

Margaret Jamieson (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab): John Scott referred to patients in Ayrshire and Arran. Does he accept that the shared-care approach that has been embraced by the consultants in acute hospitals in Ayrshire and Arran, and their input in looking after patients who suffer from cancer, is to be commended?

John Scott: As Margaret Jamieson knows, I welcome any approaches that are being made to

address a difficult situation. The reality is that it is still not a good situation and we all want it to be improved.

As Dr Anna Gregor noted on 19 April, when commenting on the Scottish situation:

"There is a severe shortage of trained manpower, of oncologists, radiographers and radiologists. We've run out of cancer nurses and specialist cancer pharmacists. We need a national strategy to solve this problem. We need more doctors, more nurses, more specialist staff."

I say to the minister that this intolerable situation must be addressed. Thirty-five new nurses and two more oncologists at the Beatson have not solved the problems. Better management of the health service over the past five years could have avoided the crisis at the Beatson and the crisis throughout Scotland. Perhaps less Government interference in the day-to-day running of the Beatson might have avoided the crisis there. The staff are magnificent in the face of adversity and the Parliament owes it to them and to the population of the west of Scotland to ensure that services improve.

16:18

Ian Jenkins (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): I welcome the tone of today's debate, in particular the tone of Nicola Sturgeon's speech. I am pleased by the minister's approach to the cancer strategy and by the motion's realistic acknowledgement of the problems that were highlighted by the Clinical Standards Board for Scotland. No one in the chamber can be complacent and I do not think that anyone is. I am also glad to see that no one is being aggressively unreasonable in the debate.

Last week, I mentioned the new cancer suite that is being constructed at the Borders general hospital. It will put positive aspects of the cancer strategy into practice. There will be better facilities for clinical management and routine treatments will be available closer to home for people in the Borders. There will be improved facilities for consultation, counselling and palliative care. There will be growing expertise among the nursing staff. Liaison will be improved across specialties and among the primary care service, carers and relatives in the community. Patients' lives will be improved substantially. It is a good model.

However, the benefits are contingent on adequate staffing levels and speedy referrals and diagnosis. I know that ministers are anxious to shorten the lines of communication between primary care and the consultant, and to shorten the waiting time between tests and communication of the results of those tests. It is crucial that we save patients from the heart-stopping fear and apprehension that accompany that wait. It is a desperately anxious period of suspended

animation, which must be shortened as soon as possible. The announcement of the referral guidance is, therefore, welcome.

I know that ministers are only too aware of the difficulties that face us in raising the profile of massively important cancers such as prostate, colorectal and oral cancer. In previous debates, I have mentioned Ben Walton, who was a former pupil of mine and who died after contracting oral cancer. I mention him again for two reasons. First, Ben was in his final year as a student at the University of Aberdeen when he died after contracting oral cancer. Secondly, his parents set up a trust and were instrumental in drawing together the Scottish oral cancer action group.

Mary Scanlon mentioned oral cancer, which has high morbidity and mortality rates. The mortality rate is not falling, but the incidence of the disease is increasing and its pattern is changing. The incidence among young men and, worryingly, among young women is rising. Margaret Smith reminded me earlier that the incidence of lung cancer among young women is also rising. Smoking, alcohol consumption and diet are important factors in those increases, but with oral cancer, many patients who contract the disease do not have the expected lifestyle. It is possible that viral infection or genetic factors are involved. I hope that the ministers will recognise that more research is required.

We must educate the public on the dangers and the lifestyle factors that contribute to oral cancer and we need to raise the disease's profile among professionals. Because early diagnosis is vital, we must help those in primary care—GPs and others—to understand the disease. There should be more courses in Scotland to give people access to information on the disease. Dental professionals are in the front line because they can spot the disease early. Given the incidence of oral cancer, a case can be made for the reintroduction of free dental checks.

We spoke two weeks ago about the modernising agenda. Pharmacists are often the first source of advice when people have ulcers that do not seem to heal. We should recognise pharmacists' role in the prevention of the disease and ensure that there are direct lines of communication between GPs and pharmacists and between hospitals and consultants.

I welcome the strategy and I ask the minister to give a commitment to raising public and professional awareness of all aspects of cancer. I make a special plea for the consideration of oral cancer.

16:22

Janis Hughes (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab): It is fitting that the Parliament should devote time to cancer, given that it is Scotland's biggest killer. As Sandra White said, lung cancer rates in the west of Scotland are particularly high. I know—because I represent a constituency in that area—only too well the sad consequences of a disease that claims more than 15,000 lives in Scotland every year. I am delighted that the Executive has identified cancer as one of its three main clinical priorities. The year-on-year improvement in mortality rates is a result of advances in medical research and technology and of increased investment.

No one doubts the link between poverty and ill health. It is a sad fact that the lung cancer mortality rate among people in the poorest areas—a number of which are in greater Glasgow—is about two and a half times the rate for people from wealthier areas. That takes us full circle to public health education and awareness, which are crucial if we are to reduce the incidence of cancer in future generations. As Nicola Sturgeon said, it is estimated that 80 to 90 per cent of all cancers are preventable, which underlines the need for increased investment in public health awareness, as well as in treatment. Much has been said in the media in the past couple of weeks about prostate cancer and the need for increased awareness to aid early detection and improve survival rates.

What is commonly known as the cancer plan is more properly known as "Cancer in Scotland: Action for Change". That refers not only to change in the way in which we deliver treatment for cancer after it is diagnosed, but to changing to healthier lifestyles and changing mindsets so that we are much more aware of the signs and symptoms that might point to the early onset of, for example, prostate cancer.

Traditionally, we Scots like to bury our heads in the sand when it comes to our health. Scots men in particular often put off seeking medical advice until it is too late for intervention and treatment. The debate is primarily about cancer treatments, but given that almost 90 per cent of cancers are preventable, it makes sense to invest and work hard on education and awareness.

Until we reduce the incidence of cancer in Scotland, we must ensure that our treatment facilities are able to provide the necessary services. I am pleased that, along with other members of the Health and Community Care Committee, I shall visit the Beatson clinic and both the Western infirmary and Gartnavel hospital over the next couple of weeks. We will talk to the patients and staff about how the cancer plan is working at the coalface, so to speak. Although the

Beatson clinic is based in Glasgow, we should acknowledge its regional status. I am pleased that the Executive has set up regional cancer advisory groups throughout the country to allow greater input from all the areas that are covered by the services that are provided at the Beatson clinic and other centres in Scotland.

Although prevention and early detection of cancer are crucial, an often-overlooked specialty in diseases such as cancer is palliative care. When last I visited the Beatson oncology centre a few months ago, I was pleased to meet John Welsh, who is the first professor in palliative care. His post was recently established by the University of Glasgow. Professor Welsh is able to take an holistic view of cancer care and meets patients and their families in order to help in a number of ways, ranging from pain and nausea control to helping family members to come to terms with living with cancer. Many patients benefit from that service, but there is a great need to extend the provision of palliative care. I ask the minister to address the issue in her response to the debate.

In conclusion, by identifying cancer as one of its three main priorities in health, the Executive has shown that it is committed to tackling Scotland's biggest killer. However, if we are to ensure that our children and grandchildren have better odds than our one-in-four chance of contracting cancer, we must invest seriously in education on the ways in which cancer can be prevented in the first place.

16:26

Dorothy-Grace Elder (Glasgow) (Ind): All members will agree that Aberdeen is sending us home healthier and happier than we were when we arrived. These have been truly golden days.

I thank Richard Simpson for his sincere personal commitment over the years, and for setting up the cross-party group in the Scottish Parliament on cancer. Janis Hughes and others have referred to the dire need for the prevention of cancer. A third of cancers are linked, in one way or another, to bad diet. That is why some of us think that every preventive measure should be considered, including the School Meals (Scotland) Bill, which seeks to offer free and better quality food to schoolchildren.

The shocking state of the Beatson clinic was not exposed properly until the consultants resigned and walked out. In future, we must offer protection to whistleblowers, who do the public a great service. We should protect their jobs and encourage people to whistleblow on behalf of patients. The minister acted promptly afterwards, but we would rather have known about the problems in advance.

I will touch briefly on the pain of cancer patients.

Shockingly, it is estimated that about 40 per cent of cancer patients do not receive proper relief from or consideration of their pain. At Ninewells hospital, which has an excellent pain unit—although its services are overstretched—doctors have often to squeeze appointments with cancer patients into their short lunch breaks. If they do not do that, the patients have to wait for six months for a first appointment. Pain services need to target cancer patients, as they do the many others who suffer from dreadfully painful conditions.

We must also reconsider the unfortunate continuation of the denial of certain cancer drugs in certain postcode areas. We have had a successful campaign about herceptin, and I pay tribute to my assistant, Evelyn McKechnie, for that work. Evelyn is a breast cancer survivor. However, the treatment of colonic cancer, which is a terrible killer, is not being helped at all by the fact that the Health Technology Board for Scotland is merely rubber-stamping the views of the National Institute for Clinical Excellence in England. It is denying many patients who have colonic cancer three major new drugs that would help them. They are the first three major drugs in 40 years that would help, yet people are being denied them because of a so-called Scottish decision as well as a decision in the south. Much more needs to be done, but I am sure that, united, we will move forward on behalf of cancer patients.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr Murray Tosh): My apologies go to two members who had hoped to be included in the debate; however, I must move now to closing speeches. I call George Lyon to close for the Liberal Democrats. You have four minutes.

16:30

George Lyon (Argyll and Bute) (LD): I welcome the tone of the debate, which has dealt consensually with the serious subject of cancer in Scotland.

The minister outlined what he hopes to achieve with the £25 million that is being spent on the cancer strategy in the coming year, including the recruitment of extra consultants, cancer nurses, radiographers and other dedicated staff. As I understand it, he said that the early money that was released for the Beatson clinic has already enabled it to recruit 50 staff. Does that mean that those staff are in place? If not, have they been recruited, but are waiting to come on board at the Beatson? Whether it is the minister or the deputy minister who winds up, can he or she tell us how long it will take to recruit doctors and nurses over and above the Beatson staff, given the recent announcement of money for that recruitment? Do the ministers expect to be able to recruit such staff in the near future? What is the fallback position if

there are difficulties in finding the required specialist skills?

I move on to the speeches of Nicola Sturgeon, Janis Hughes and Dorothy-Grace Elder. They highlighted that preventive measures are surely the key to the longer-term game of resolving Scotland's appalling health record in cancer. It is clear that preventive measures are the only fundamental long-term objectives that we can pursue if we want to improve the Scottish health record. Public health education is important; it means dealing with diet, exercise, smoking and alcohol abuse, but those are difficult subjects to tackle. We can stand here and talk until we are blue in the face about the health and general well-being of Scotland, and about how we want a reduction in health problems and an improvement in how we deal with those problems. I question how we will divert people into eating a healthier diet and taking more exercise and how we will reduce smoking and alcohol abuse. It is easy to stand up and speak about that job, but it is difficult to envisage how it will be delivered. It seems to me that the key is to tackle young people and ensure that we educate them in school at the stage of life at which they are more likely to set a trend for coming years.

Questions then arise about how we will persuade our kids to take more exercise and how we will encourage them to eat a better diet. I heard it suggested on several occasions today that free school meals would cure all the problems; I am sorry, but I do not believe that for one minute. No matter what kind of food you put in front of kids, it will be difficult to persuade them not to eat Microchips, crisps and all the other lovely things that they seem to think appropriate. Free school meals will not cure that problem.

On encouraging more physical exercise, one tends to find that, in schools, kids are inclined to take up physical exercise because it is part of the school agenda. However, as they move into their teenage years, the attraction of smoking and alcohol takes over and much exercise is discontinued.

I occasionally watch television at night and over the past few months I have seen a lot about the investment and good work that is done by the health improvement fund through the Health Education Board for Scotland. The adverts that are used are hard-hitting. However, when I ask kids what influence those adverts have had on their lives, they are not even aware that the adverts have been on television. The adverts have had a minimal impact on shaping kids' views about whether to give up smoking and drinking or whether to vary their diet.

I wonder whether we are doing enough to evaluate the impact of the health improvement

fund. Is it delivering? I take it that a substantial amount of money has been invested in the advertising campaigns. Is there any measure of the effectiveness of the campaigns? I, for one, question whether the television adverts are influencing the eating habits and behaviour that we want to target. I ask the minister to tell us what evaluation has been done of the effectiveness of the work that is being carried out in that area.

I echo Margaret Smith's congratulations to the Minister for Health and Community Care on his intervention in relation to the desperate problems that face the Beatson unit, which has been mentioned many times today. It is clear that his intervention has stabilised the situation but, as every speaker said, there is a huge amount of work to do to improve the service and rebuild the confidence of the staff. In the interests of all patients in the west of Scotland, the minister must follow through this important project to ensure that we get a first-class cancer service for everyone whom the Beatson serves.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I must explain to members that there is a mistake in the script that was provided to the Presiding Officers, which meant that I called the first closing speaker at 4.29 pm, which would condemn Mary Mulligan to speaking for 18 minutes at the end. I propose to call Des McNulty, who was waiting to speak, and to give him four minutes, even though we had started the closing speeches. I will review the timing of the rest of the debate when we reach the end of his speech.

16:36

Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab): Last week, the Finance Committee heard from Andy Kerr that the money identified by Gordon Brown as being available for health in the UK would not necessarily be handed over to the Scottish Executive health department to be spent on the health service, but would be considered in the context of improving health outcomes. I warmly welcome that approach because inputs, or the amount of money that is spent on health care, are less important than outcomes, or what is delivered in terms of health improvements.

Money is needed for new drugs, equipment and facilities, but as leading health professionals such as Dr Harry Burns have repeatedly argued, improving the health outcomes of our education, housing and transport systems could have as great an impact on people's health as direct investment in health services.

If the health dimension was not previously at the forefront of ministers' consideration, I hope that it will be during the spending review that is under way. Cross-cutting strategies and initiatives are

essential if we are to succeed in improving Scotland's health. However, hard evidence that spending additional resources will produce improvements in health must be provided before allocations are made. Such improvements should be sustainable as well as measurable.

More emphasis must be put on prevention and early detection as the cancer strategy is implemented. I will make some suggestions that I would like the minister and his colleagues to adopt as policy and spending priorities.

Taking effective measures to reduce smoking must be a top priority in tackling cancer. I will not repeat the statistics—they were mentioned by Nicola Sturgeon and others—but I will highlight the fact that a 35-year-old smoker can expect to live six or seven years less than a non-smoker can. Smoking rates are much higher among poor people and disadvantaged groups, such as people with mental health problems, illicit drug users and the homeless. I believe that we have a clear duty to do more to prevent avoidable early death and ill health in Scotland. Few measures deliver health gains anything like as cost-effectively as smoking cessation does, especially if a step-care approach, which matches medical interventions to the smoker's motivation to overcome addiction, is adopted. We need to upgrade significantly the resourcing of smoking cessation services to link in with the excellent prevention campaigns that the Executive is already funding.

Smoke-free zones in the workplace and in public places should be extended. The Scottish Executive's justice, education and other departments should be drawn into joined-up activity involving every Government department in reducing smoking, the health benefits of which are concrete and achievable.

The minister should also address poor diet. We can make a huge impact on our cardiac and cancer statistics by changing our diet, in particular by removing or reducing the fat in the food chain in Scotland. Healthy eating is not more boring or difficult, need not be any more expensive than eating unhealthily and the dividend that can be got by moving to a healthier diet is not just a longer life, but a fuller and more active life.

We need to ensure that we have joined-up approaches to drugs and alcohol, which give tackling alcohol-linked problems the same priority that we currently apply to drugs misuse. We know that the consequences for families and communities of the abuse of alcohol and the health risks to the individual are every bit as damaging as those associated with drugs. The priority that we give to tackling the health impact of alcohol compared to that we give to tackling drugs is difficult to justify. Action is urgently needed to discourage both binge drinking and the promotion

of drinking among young people.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: In the interests of equity, I invite a brief speech from Linda Fabiani.

16:40

Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP): I am glad that I came back into the chamber and discovered your error.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: So am I.

Linda Fabiani: So is Mary Scanlon.

Everything that has been said has been consensual. All members present welcome the acknowledgement that we must have a strategy for cancer treatment and that that strategy must be implemented and monitored.

However, I ask the minister to reconsider the SNP amendment. Although we all agree broadly with the Executive motion and we know what must be done, a bit of vision is lacking. I believe that Nicola Sturgeon's amendment provides something towards a vision for the Scottish cancer strategy.

The results of the CSBS's investigations highlight very clearly the lack of staff and the worries about getting specialist staff to work in our cancer services. They mention the few specialist nurses and the varying levels of access to specialist nurses depending on geography and circumstance. The CSBS has great concern about the staffing of cancer services throughout Scotland.

Although it is admirable that we are all pulling together on the matter and that we want to make a big difference through the cancer strategy, we must be realistic. We must consider what resources we have and what we must do to encourage people to enter the service so that it can be fully staffed. I urge members to consider the tone of the SNP amendment and to accept it in the constructive manner in which it is intended.

A couple of members have mentioned Margaret Ewing today. Fergus Ewing said to me that cancer services are obviously now close to his and his family's heart. He asked me to say that his family's experience—and that of anyone to whom he has spoken—is that, when someone ends up being treated for cancer, they are full of praise for the service that they are given and the great treatment that they are given by all who are involved in hospitals. That applies not only to the doctors and nurses, but to the ancillary staff, who look after them very well. We should aim for that experience for every cancer patient in Scotland. Bringing waiting times down also means that we require more staff in such specialist services.

I ask members to think seriously about

supporting the SNP amendment.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We return to the closing round.

16:42

Ben Wallace (North-East Scotland) (Con): The Scottish Conservatives welcome the chance to participate in an important debate on the planning and development of future services for dealing with cancer in Scotland. Already, many members have talked of cancer's heavy pillaging of Scottish society. Over the past few weeks, the issue has certainly been brought to the fore as I read the CSBS's publications and listened to the contributions at the cross-party group on cancer's "Scotland against cancer" conference.

To read through the frightening statistics on cancer is not pleasant. The statistics are a depressing instance of how damaging cancer can be to the population of Scotland. I remember the comments of Professor Rankin, who is the Imperial Cancer Research Fund professor of cancer medicine at the University of Dundee, that 40 per cent of her lung cancer patients are dead within five years. Such depressing reading only underlines the challenges for us in facing up to and dealing with the killer among us.

A number of problems have consistently been raised in the CSBS documents and I will deal with those. Nurses are at the forefront of dealing with cancer diagnosis and care. Successful health care systems throughout the world rely more and more on specialist nurses. In Scotland, we lack any data on how many such vital individuals we have and where they are. If we are to have proper, managed clinical networks throughout our country, we need to do more to map the services that are available to us to ensure that our assets are used fully.

One of the common complaints from specialists in most managed clinical networks—not just cancer services—is of a lack of administrative support. I am glad that the minister announced more funding for such support. My colleague John Scott pointed out the problems with clerical support for managing the network at the Beatson centre. Without such support, we cannot facilitate the good work that we hope to do.

For a network to succeed, decision making must be devolved all the way along the line. GPs, nurses and specialists need to be able to back up their decisions and choices with funding. Empowerment—or rather the lack of it—was another problem that was highlighted in the CSBS reports and by clinicians to whom I spoke.

The reports raised issues about the passage of information and about the IT network. I know that the minister raised the matter, which he

recognises as important. IT is vital to the working of the health service and facilitates interagency working, but Professor Cassidy said at the "Scotland against cancer" conference that that simply did not happen at his level—interagency working was not going ahead. The sooner we get IT in place from the beginning to the end of the process, the better and more efficiently we will be able to use our resources.

We cannot finish the debate without asking whether the NHS will be able to face up to the biggest challenge before it. The opportunities for cancer treatment have exploded over the past few years and the possibilities for developing new diagnostic machines and techniques have grown. Many existing measures can speed up the treatment of cancer patients. In some cases the measures are there, but we do not get access to them. For example, positron emission tomography—PET—techniques are used in diagnosis. Where PET is available, it has cut the need for surgical investigations of lung cancer by 25 per cent. It is three times more available on the European continent than it is here.

We have only one experimental PET unit: the John Mallard Scottish PET centre at the University of Aberdeen. Such facilities are available to people in other health care systems, but we do not seem to get them here. Many more techniques and drugs will be available in future. We have to decide whether the NHS system, with all the money that is being put into it, will be able to keep up with those advances. If it does not, are we doing our best by patients who suffer from cancer?

The points made by George Lyon and Des McNulty about prevention could not have been put better. Prevention is obviously the way forward. I am an ex-smoker, who always thought that smoking was none of my business, and stood back from it. I am still pretty much of that view, but I am worried by having read more of the technical data on how damaging to the population smoking really is. I may well be starting to move in the same direction as those who seek to clamp down on it.

We welcome the Executive's motion and will support it, because of its honesty in recognising the problems that exist in cancer services and because it seeks real solutions. We will judge how far the Executive progresses.

16:47

Shona Robison (North-East Scotland) (SNP): I, too, welcome the tone of the debate, which has reflected the importance that our society gives to tackling cancer. There will be few of us whose lives have not been touched by cancer in one way or another, perhaps through friends or family. We

all have a vested interest in ensuring that cancer services in Scotland are the best that they can be. I take this opportunity to pay tribute to the hard-working staff throughout Scotland who strive to provide services in the best way possible.

I will focus on some of the key issues that remain outstanding in the problem areas that we must address if we are to achieve the best cancer services. Waiting times for diagnosis and treatment are still too long. One of the CSBS reports described waiting times for computerised tomography—CT—scans and investigative procedures as “unacceptably long”. Such factors will sometimes make the difference between a patient getting treatment at a sufficiently early stage or not. At that point, patients will be very anxious indeed. What they want is prompt diagnosis and prompt treatment. That problem must be addressed.

Equipment is also important in early detection. One of the CSBS reports said that there were not enough linear accelerators in Scotland to meet patient demand. Much of the equipment is old and subject to frequent breakdown. We must strive towards the aim recommended by the Royal College of Radiologists of having five linear accelerators per million people.

Staff shortages have been mentioned by a number of members, including shortages of radiologists, pathologists, clinical oncologists and specialist nurses—we are all familiar with that. I agree with Margaret Smith’s comments about aggressive work force planning. I welcome the investment for additional posts, but we need to do more, because, as Nicola Sturgeon said, we need to find the people to fill the posts. We need to look proactively outside Scotland for those people. The SNP has made a positive suggestion for a special envoy—someone to recruit skilled and specialised staff throughout Europe and beyond. I hope that the minister will respond positively to that suggestion.

The issue of access to drugs has been raised. We spend much less per head of population on cancer drugs than do other countries. We spend an average of 90p per head, compared to £4 or £5 per head in other parts of Europe. We are all aware, through constituency cases, of postcode prescribing, including well-documented problems of access to taxane and herceptin or other drugs.

The key is prevention. Many members have mentioned the need for education and public information and the need to tackle deprivation. Mary Scanlon and Ian Jenkins mentioned oral cancer—a much-neglected form of the disease. We can do more. We can encourage people to visit their dentists and I agree with the call for free dental check-ups, because we should remove barriers to the early detection of oral cancer.

Ken Macintosh mentioned David Lane’s comment that a cure for cancer is called stopping smoking, which brings the message home. Levels of smoking in deprived areas are much higher than they are in other areas, which is why tobacco advertising targets such areas. I hope that we will see a ban on tobacco advertising sooner rather than later. I pay tribute to Nicola Sturgeon’s work in pushing that agenda in this Parliament.

Everyone in the chamber agrees on the need to tackle cancer as a key priority; nobody would disagree with that. Our party has made a positive contribution to the debate through the call for an envoy to work throughout Europe, recruiting specialist staff. I hope that the minister will respond positively to that suggestion.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Mary Mulligan to respond to the debate. She has eight minutes to do so.

16:52

The Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care (Mrs Mary Mulligan): I think that everybody is mightily relieved that I do not have 18 minutes. [*Interruption.*] Members need not cheer quite so loudly.

I associate myself and my Labour colleagues with the comments that Nicola Sturgeon made about Margaret Ewing and her health, which we hope is improving. We wish her a speedy return to health.

Like many members who have contributed today, I have heard about and seen at first hand the commitment and enthusiasm of NHS staff and their real desire to make improvements that will benefit patients so that they will have confidence in the treatment and care that they receive. A good start has been made with soundly based plans for those who know what is needed—the doctors, nurses, pharmacists and other staff who provide treatment and care day in, day out.

There has been a lot of agreement in this afternoon’s debate and I acknowledge the concerns that have been raised about staffing. We are of the opinion that a number of actions must be taken to address staff issues where we experience shortages, which we recognise will continue if we do not take action. The Executive will shortly publish its strategy for professions allied to medicine, which will address issues for such staff—not doctors and nurses—and will, I hope, improve the situation with regard to their recruitment and retention. Nursing recruitment and retention is high on the agenda. We had a debate on nursing recruitment in Edinburgh not so long ago. We have 1,180 more qualified nurses and midwives than we had in 1997 and a further 10,000 will qualify by 2005, which is 1,500 more

than was previously planned.

However, we are not complacent and we continue to consider ways of encouraging people to take up nursing or to return to it. We are introducing better pay structures, guidance on family-friendly policies and more flexible working practices. Those elements should all contribute to increasing the numbers of nurses.

On doctors, it was mentioned that the Temple report will be published shortly. That will give us indications for the medium to long term about how we can build up those numbers.

The Scottish Cancer Group is working with therapy radiographers to seek innovative action on education and training and on recruitment and retention. We want people to take part in discussions to achieve a positive result.

Overseas recruitment has also been mentioned. Anna Gregor attended an international conference in the US last week, at which she met many international experts and professionals in cancer services. As well as actively promoting the Beatson oncology centre, she was building links with international colleagues who might be tempted to come to work in Scotland.

Nicola Sturgeon: I pay tribute to the work of Anna Gregor, but she has an important job to do here in Scotland in improving cancer services. Does the minister agree that we need someone to do a full-time job on behalf of Scotland to ensure that sufficient effort is put into international recruitment and that Scotland does not fall further behind other countries in the battle to recruit people?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Before the minister answers, I make the point that I made the other day. In this chamber, the impact of conversation seems to be much more pronounced than it is in Edinburgh. I would be grateful if members would allow the minister to conclude her speech in a proper atmosphere.

Mrs Mulligan: Thank you. Although I gave Anna Gregor as an example, I am aware that other members of the cancer teams will be making contact with international colleagues, whom we hope to encourage to come to work in Scotland. We will continue to examine every avenue to ensure that we have the best staff in our hospitals.

Ben Wallace mentioned nursing and cancer nurses in particular. The national nurse co-ordinator, who has been appointed as part of the cancer plan, will pay specific attention to nursing.

Ben Wallace also mentioned IT, which again is high on our agenda. The IT group will look at the issue as a matter of urgency, so that we are properly able to support clinical provision. We acknowledge that that is an issue.

Many members said that although improvements in treatment have been made, prevention is important. Several members mentioned stopping smoking; others mentioned good oral health, diet and physical activity. I assure the Parliament that we want to give the highest possible priority to such areas and the investment that the health improvement fund provides is aimed at tackling that.

I will take the example of smoking. A variety of approaches are being developed, including nicotine replacement therapy, prevention and education and the voluntary charter on smoking in public places. We must examine a number of avenues, but we acknowledge that prevention is the best policy. We want to take positive action to encourage people to assess their lifestyles to help avoid the occurrence of cancer in later life. Good oral health was mentioned and the plans that the Executive has put in place to improve the provision of dental care throughout Scotland will address some of the points that were made.

Several members mentioned linear accelerators. Although I accept Nicola Sturgeon's point about present provision not being what we would wish it to be, I assure her that the rolling programme of introducing linear accelerators should take us to the desired level.

Mary Scanlon referred to GPs. GPs are involved in regional networks. At the cancer conference that was mentioned earlier, a plea was made for more primary care staff to join the focus groups to help to plan for the future. Such staff should support the Scottish Cancer Group, which is planning a primary care workshop that will involve teams from across the country and bring them together with secondary and tertiary care colleagues to explore how best to maximise all the available resources.

In conclusion, I am sorry that I have not been able to address everybody's comments today, but the debate has been constructive. As we make progress in cancer care, more people will survive. It is estimated that, by 2014, although 7,000 more people a year will experience cancer, a much smaller proportion will die from it. That means that there will be more older people, as we are very much aware. On that note, I want to take the opportunity to welcome Mr Jack Jones, who is in the public gallery and is a great campaigner for older people. *[Applause.]*

As well as adding my support to the many thanks and congratulations that have been given to Aberdeen today, in closing the cancer debate I must also pay tribute to all involved in developing the cancer programme. We are investing in staff and equipment and we are redesigning services and developing staff for enhanced roles in the delivery of care. However, none of what has been

achieved so far—or what we hope to achieve in future—would have been possible without the efforts of all the staff who work in cancer services and provide care for all the people of Scotland.

Point of Order

17:02

Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I request permission to move a motion without notice in the following terms:

“That the Parliament notes that the First Minister has breached clause 1.1(c) of the code of ministerial conduct in answers that he gave in Parliament this afternoon and calls on the First Minister to make a statement to Parliament immediately to clarify the issue.”

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): I am not minded to accept the motion. The section of the ministerial code of conduct to which Mr Swinney referred reads as follows:

“It is of paramount importance that Ministers give accurate and truthful information to the Parliament, correcting any inadvertent error at the earliest opportunity.”

My understanding is that the First Minister sought to clarify what he said at the end of First Minister's questions. Like everybody else, he will look at the *Official Report* when it is published. If he feels that he needs to make any further statement later, that is entirely up to him.

Mr Swinney *rose—*

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell) *rose—*

The Presiding Officer: The First Minister is trying to catch my eye, so I will hear him before I come back to Mr Swinney.

The First Minister: I am happy to clarify the position of Scottish ministers in relation to fisheries delegations, which is what I thought that I had done at half-past 3. Scottish ministers have regularly led the delegation in particular discussions in the Council and at other events outwith the formal Council in Brussels. Leading the UK delegation in particular discussions is not the same as leading the whole delegation on a formal basis—[*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Order.

The First Minister: However, Scottish ministers have led that delegation with pride and with some effect. Those who seek to distort that fact are wrong. I hope that I have now clarified to Parliament that the phraseology that I used is one that should be accepted by members.

Mr Swinney: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. The problem is that the First Minister said in answer to questions today—[*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Order. Let me hear the point of order.

Mr Swinney: The First Minister said that Scotland has led the fisheries delegation on a

number of occasions. He said to Winnie Ewing that the Scottish Executive has regularly led the fisheries delegation and that Mr Finnie himself has led it. He then made a statement at 3.30 pm that undermined those clear answers, which contradicted parliamentary answers that had been given by Mr Wallace. Is it not important that we have a First Minister who tells the truth?

The Presiding Officer: I listened carefully to what the First Minister said. It is perfectly clear that he has indicated his position to Parliament.

The First Minister: Further to the point of order—and I hope that this is the last thing that I will have to say on this subject—I say to members that, long before the Deputy First Minister answered questions on this subject for any member of the chamber, I myself answered a number of questions about which ministers had led delegations to European Union Council meetings. I am perfectly well aware of which members have led delegations, in the formal sense, at such meetings. The members who represent Scotland in those delegations have represented those delegations and led them in discussions on a regular basis. That is an appropriate phrase to use. It is not inaccurate and I knew exactly what I was saying when I said it.

Decision Time

17:04

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): The first question is, that motion S1M-3164, in the name of Patricia Ferguson, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on the approval of statutory instruments, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees that the following instruments be approved—

the draft Scotland Act 1998 (Modifications of Schedule 5) Order 2002;

the draft Scotland Act 1998 (Transfer of Functions to the Scottish Ministers etc) Order 2002; and

the Food Protection (Emergency Prohibitions) (Amnesic Shellfish Poisoning) (West Coast) (No 4) (Scotland) Order 2002 (SSI 2002/231).

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S1M-3166, in the name of Patricia Ferguson, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on the designation of a lead committee, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees that the Local Government Committee is designated as Lead Committee in consideration of the Local Government in Scotland Bill and that the Transport and the Environment Committee and the Education, Culture and Sport Committee be secondary committees.

The Presiding Officer: The third question is, that amendment S1M-3160.1, in the name of Nicola Sturgeon, which seeks to amend the motion in the name of Malcolm Chisholm, on implementing the cancer strategy, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Adam, Brian (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 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)
 Ewing, Dr Winnie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (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)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harding, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 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)
 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)
 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)
 Reid, Mr George (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 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)
 Wallace, Ben (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 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)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Fitzpatrick, Brian (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Lab)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Jenkins, Ian (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 MacKay, Angus (Edinburgh South) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 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)
 McLeish, Henry (Central Fife) (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)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mr Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Ochil) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North-East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Mrs Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Thomson, Elaine (Aberdeen North) (Lab)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 46, Against 66, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The last question is, that motion S1M-3160, in the name of Malcolm Chisholm, on implementing the cancer strategy, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament acknowledges the problems highlighted by the recent Clinical Standards Board for Scotland reports on cancer services; welcomes the Cancer Strategy and the significant and dedicated resources that have been allocated for its implementation; supports the key role of front-line staff in deciding investment priorities and leading service change, and looks forward to sustained progress in implementing the strategy and reaching all the Clinical Standards Board for Scotland standards.

Timber Industry

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): The final item of business today—and, indeed, of our stay in Aberdeen—is a members' business debate on motion S1M-2953, in the name of Alex Fergusson, on the timber industry. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament acknowledges the value of timber as a primary product within rural Scotland and the 11,000 jobs which are dependent on that industry; recognises the very real difficulties faced by some rural local authorities in maintaining and improving minor roads for timber extraction, and believes that the Scottish Executive should meet COSLA's Rural Affairs Committee and representatives of the forestry industry to determine a satisfactory way forward, recognising that the placing of weight restriction orders, which effectively landlock large areas of mature timber, is not a realistic solution.

17:09

Alex Fergusson (South of Scotland) (Con): I begin by saying how very pleased I am that this motion has been picked for the pinnacle of our short sojourn here in the city of Aberdeen. I take the opportunity, as others have done, to thank all those involved in making our stay such a successful and enjoyable experience. To be picked to complete the proceedings is indeed a privilege.

I hope that I make a rather better job of speaking to this motion than I did of writing an article on the subject in "Holyrood Magazine" a couple of weeks ago. I scribbled an 800-word article at the very last minute and I did not even have time to proof read it. Even so, I was somewhat astonished when I picked up a copy of the magazine and read the following words in my name:

"I started farming in 1971, the beginnings of a decade which was to see a massive increase in the number of Scotland's hills".

In my slightly indecent haste I had omitted to add the words "which came under afforestation".

Nonetheless, few of us who have lived in rural Scotland during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, particularly in the Borders, Dumfries and Galloway, Ayrshire, Argyll and here in the north-east, will forget the almost breathtaking speed at which many of our hills and uplands became engulfed in an ever-growing, all-enveloping tide of Sitka spruce, as blanket afforestation—the order of the day—continued apace. At that time, many of us did not like what we saw, such as the vertical open drains, which ensured the rapid run-off of rainfall in a way that nature never intended and which has altered some of our rivers to their eternal detriment. We did not like the planting of

those ubiquitous evergreen trees to the edge of every road, which obliterated the stunning views that lay beyond them, and the locked gates at the end of every forest road, which prevented access by the public, whose taxes were funding the plantations.

I am more than happy to say that many of those difficulties have now been overcome. Plantations are now planned within aesthetically more pleasing parameters; drainage techniques have altered, slowing down run-off while still allowing the young trees to be planted in dry, upturned soil; and access has been greatly increased by forestry authorities that proactively seek out and develop the leisure opportunities that many plantations now offer.

So much has improved, yet there is one problem that is increasing and is showing few signs of being overcome: the transportation of the 10 million tonnes annually of mature timber that is now ready for harvesting from the plantations that were created in the 1960s and 1970s. Let us not forget that the timber from the 1980s and 1990s is still to come. That will lead to a 100 per cent increase in mature timber over the next 10 to 15 years, doubling the transportation problem that we face today. Whichever way we look at it there is one indubitable fact: every timber load starts its journey to the sawmill on a road. That is the case and it will remain the case. It is also true to say that such roads are often minor B roads or roads that are entirely unclassified. Local authorities, which have the responsibility for the upkeep and maintenance of such roads, have been increasingly reluctant to accept that timber lorries constitute a legitimate use of public roads.

In some areas, such as Polbae in Dumfries and Galloway, the council has imposed temporary weight restrictions on bridges—an act that, in effect, landlocks the now mature timber. In the specific case of Polbae, a bridge on the unclassified U111W has had a temporary weight restriction placed on it, which the council is now seeking to extend. Twenty objections to the extension have been received and the matter is to go to a public hearing. Scottish Woodlands, the managing agent, has been advised that it could take 18 months to two years before the Executive even appoints a reporter. I will not go into too much detail, but somewhere in the minister's mailbag is a letter from me on the issue and no doubt he will get round to answering it one of these weeks. The end result is that, at Polbae, 150,000 tonnes of mature timber, which has been produced at no small expense to the taxpayer, is stuck and has been left to rot, because of the reluctance of local and central Government to allow its release by ensuring that the roads infrastructure is up to the job.

Until recently, one could have justifiably accused the timber industry of doing little to sort out its own problems. However, that is no longer the case. Timber transport groups have been formed with all stakeholders and preferred route maps are being negotiated, although the possibility of a fourth category of road in addition to the currently agreed three is giving rise to considerable concern. The use of internal forest roads is being maximised, although surely the use of publicly funded Forestry Commission roads for private timber transportation should be more acceptable. The use of rail and sea modes of transport is being extended. However, I say again that every timber load begins on a road.

Until a few years ago, Dumfries and Galloway Council received more than £2 million per year from European sources. It was able to put that money into minor roads improvement. The council no longer receives that funding. The stress on the council's other budgets means that it underspent on roads by almost £2.4 million last year. There is no doubt that that situation is mirrored in other local authorities. At least in Dumfries and Galloway, deflectograph tests and surveys are being carried out in order to come up with an accurate picture of how much those minor roads can stand. Few other local authorities are matching that initiative.

The Executive cannot escape its role in this issue and that is the purpose of my motion today. Vast amounts of public money have gone into the building of an industry that now employs 11,000 people in the Scottish growing and primary processing sectors. The forestry cluster industries provide 44,000 jobs. The industry is worth £800 million per year to the Scottish economy, has invested £100 million over the past 10 years, and has become an integral driver of the rural economy alongside farming, fishing and tourism. Its margins have never been tighter, and yet never has it felt more isolated.

Timber is a crop whose harvest is beginning to peak. That harvest must get to market, yet it is prevented from doing so. The Executive must get a grip on the situation and do its bit. It must ensure that gulfs are being bridged rather than bridges being closed. That cannot be a solution and I call on the Executive to play its part in maximising the value that timber can add to Scotland's rural economy by ensuring that that timber has a trouble-free journey from forest to sawmill.

17:16

John Farquhar Munro (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD): I am obliged to Mr Fergusson for raising this issue. He concentrated most of his speech on the issues as they affect the south of Scotland and the Borders; I wish to point

out that we have similar problems in the Highlands.

We are proud of the tremendous resource that Forest Enterprise and many private developers have established in much of rural Scotland. In many areas, that resource has now reached maturity and requires to be harvested, processed and marketed. Therein lies the problem. We must address the situation and move to provide a solution, which can prove difficult.

The current transport infrastructure is inadequate and does not have the capacity to allow the expansion and future viability of the forest products industry and its associated enterprises. Investment in road, rail and sea transport must be the essential element to improve the strategic links that, in due course, will encourage Forest Enterprise and other companies to promote and participate in the economic well-being of our rural communities.

I suggest that consideration must now be given to the allocation of the substantial resources that are required to improve our peripheral single-track roads and weak bridges, about which we hear constantly. We need to encourage—by inducement if need be—timber to be loaded on to our rail network, particularly by allowing more direct line-side loading. The rail industry has come to accept that and we should support it.

Many of our ports and harbours could be improved and extended to accept round timber for coastal shipping. We have excellent coastal facilities but we are not making use of that resource. If we were to use shipping, we would be removing large tonnages from our currently fragile road systems.

Forest Enterprise is extracting timber from remote and isolated areas of the Highlands and Islands by tug and barge—an innovative exercise. As many members will know, many of those areas are devoid of any road system. It is a difficult and expensive exercise that we must encourage and support financially. Consideration should be given to the provision of an enhanced freight facilities grant to assist in that laudable initiative.

This is not a political issue, nor should it be kicked about like the proverbial football. We should all unite. We must have the support of all the political groupings in this Parliament in order to have a progressive and sustainable Forest Enterprise and forest products industry in the years ahead.

17:20

Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP): This debate is welcome. I congratulate Alex Fergusson on securing it,

particularly because many of the people with whom we on the Rural Development Committee have spoken who are involved in the forest products/timber growers sector feel that they are the cinderella industry of rural Scotland because their problems are not the subject of as much debate and consideration as farming and fishing. There is a measure of truth in that. I hope that we will soon have Executive-led debates on more general issues in relation to forestry strategy.

Particular problems affect the forestry industry. Alex Fergusson acknowledged the value of timber to the rural economy—11,000 direct jobs and 44,000 indirect jobs. The current transport problems will multiply exponentially over the next five to 10 years. The reason is simple: we are facing an increase in production of around 100 per cent. Over the next five, 10 or 15 years, twice as much wood will require to be harvested as is harvested now. There are problems now, but there will be a manifold increase. This debate affords a welcome opportunity to discuss the problems that we face today.

The industry is willing to engage with everyone to find solutions to the problems. Perhaps those engagements could best occur at a local level. Timber transport groups have been formed, communities have been consulted and preferred route maps for road haulage have been negotiated. Those are all parts of the solution to the problem, but the Executive must recognise that, for the reasons the timber industry has identified, the state of our roads in rural Scotland is simply not acceptable.

As John Farquhar Munro said, this is not a party-political problem—although it is disappointing that no Labour MSPs apart from the minister are present at this point in the debate. Were they here, I hope that they would agree that it is simply unacceptable that in Highland Council area, for example, roads are maintained only once every 200 years. Concern about the state of the roads is felt by everybody in the Highlands. It is a serious issue, but for the timber industry the haulage problems that arise are of particular importance. The wood must be harvested, but weight restrictions on bridges make that difficult, if not impossible.

I hope that the minister will take on board the need to engage locally and the need to come up with more funding for the maintenance of roads in rural Scotland. I say that seriously, and not at all in a party-political way. I hope that the Parliament can unite behind the concept that more money must be spent on maintaining our roads. Failure to do that will be a false economy. If the roads are not maintained properly now, when the maintenance is required, the cost of carrying out maintenance in five years' time will be far greater.

In other words, the problem will get worse exponentially.

There are many other points that I could make, but I prefer to leave it at that in the hope that in a spirit of consensus we will obtain from the minister at the close of this debate a clear recognition that we must spend more money on maintaining rural roads and that the problems that have been identified by the industry, and the points that have been made in this debate, graphically illustrate that pressing need.

17:24

Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): Our forests will be around, I hope, long after the oil runs out, and they will provide us with energy and products that at present are provided by oil. It is terribly important that we take care of our forests and that we do everything we can to make sure that the forestry industry survives.

People might find it odd that somebody who campaigns against the construction of unnecessary motorways should speak in favour of a motion on the improvement of rural roads, but I do not think that that is contradictory. It is clear from what Alex Fergusson said that our rural roads need a considerable amount of attention.

The bargain goes two ways. Heavy lorries do much damage to roads. Perhaps the industry can agree not to overload lorries and, preferably, to keep axle weights down as much as possible, within economic limits.

Alex Fergusson: Does Robin Harper acknowledge that the industry has been proactive in offering to councils that have a problem to minimise load sizes, to reduce axle weights and to undertake a limited number of journeys a day, as a way of getting over that problem?

Robin Harper: I rest informed. I am glad to hear that. The Executive should do everything it can to promote such agreements.

I will put in a word for rail, which I am sure Ian Jenkins and Christine Grahame will talk about. Multiple advantages would arise from a Borders rail link and from upgrading the Highland rail network and the Dumfries and Galloway network. Not only the forestry industry would benefit. There are many arguments for such improvements. Many of us have asked the Executive please to find more money for railways.

The last comment that I will make does not fall strictly within the scope of Alex Fergusson's motion, but I want to mention the fact that the water environment and water services bill will be introduced soon. The Executive should consider the contribution that forestry can make to flood control. That is one of the many contributions that

forestry can make to the Scottish economy.

17:27

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): Members did not think that I would come here and not talk about the railway, especially as Kielder forest is the largest afforested area in the UK. The harvest is being taken from that great forest and great big lorries are trundling through small villages that were never meant to take such freight. Not only roads, but buildings, are damaged and the lorries make the lives of people who live in those villages and small towns unpleasant.

Introducing weight restrictions and repairing roads would be a temporary solution in the south of Scotland, but that is nonsense when Riccarton junction still exists—people can visit it—and has all the prospects for laying track. The forest is round about it. The timber could be taken on track roads and loaded on to a train to be taken over the border, which is its destination. That would make sense.

The problem for members such as Ian Jenkins and for others who campaign for the Borders railway line is that freight seems to be slipping off the agenda. The Scottish Parliament information centre research note that was published before the Parliament's debate on the Borders rail link two years ago contained a quotation from Donald Dewar, who said:

"A rail link may also be a useful freight route, and could make commuting journeys to Edinburgh quicker and safer."

Such language is not used now. The language that is used now appears later in that research note:

"The track would be more suitable for local or regional type diesel multiple units than for high speed Inter City type trains or freight."

That is wrong. The problems must be solved over generations. The line should be heavy gauge.

The illusion has been created that English Welsh and Scottish Railway Ltd is not interested in a freight line through the centre of Scotland. It is.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: A little more about timber and trees, please.

Christine Grahame: I am going back to trees. EWS would be prepared to operate on a freight line, which would carry timber through the Scottish Borders—I have mentioned trees again. It would also take trees—I have said the word again—into England. A lie has been told about EWS, on which Ian Jenkins may pick up. EWS has made it plain that there is every reason to have a freight line through the centre, to clear freight from the east and west coast lines. On that freight line, EWS would carry many, many trees.

17:30

David Mundell (South of Scotland) (Con): It is important to re-emphasise the importance of the timber-forestry-trees industry. However, the industry was oversold in parts of Scotland, including in Dumfries and Galloway—people were sold the story that hundreds of jobs would be created as a result of trees being planted on the hills in those areas. The jobs did not materialise, as the number of people who were needed to manage the industry was small.

We are now seeing a number of innovative developments from which people can reap economic benefits. The Rural Development Committee recently visited the Howies sawmill at Dalbeattie. Another development is Stevens Croft between Lockerbie and Moffat, where a number of production facilities add value to the natural timber product. Those are positive developments for Dumfries and Galloway. They are innovative and high tech; they do not fit the traditional concept of single-blade sawmills that are operated by people with three fingers, having lost the others in accidents.

The difficulty lies in getting the product to those locations. Stevens Croft is an ideal example of that, despite the fact that it is located centrally and is next to a railway line. I say to the minister that we want freight facilities grant to enable a link to be created from Stevens Croft to the main west coast line. I say to Christine Grahame and Ian Jenkins that, although I am very supportive of the extension of the Borders rail link from Kielder to Carlisle, we cannot get away from the fact that timber still has to get to the railway line from places such as Eskdalemuir. To do so, it has to travel through the centre of Langholm, a town that is totally unsuited to such traffic. Timber has to travel to Stevens Croft through communities such as Lochmaben.

The volume of timber will rise over the next 20 years. We have to consider how the timber is to reach facilities and bring economic benefits to the region in which it is grown. That is a tremendous challenge, which, as other members said, will not be solved by glib phrases or by politicising the issue. We have to ensure that our local road network can cope with the volume of traffic.

Innovative solutions have been developed elsewhere. One solution is to keep timber traffic off road within forests. That needs to be encouraged. In France, diesel is offered at differential rates, which allows those who are transporting timber within forests to avoid the duty on diesel. That is achieved using vehicles that operate with two tanks.

Given that Allan Wilson is to respond to the debate, we will not get a wooden response. We

will get one that is more thoughtful than some of the answers that we have been given in the past, when we were told that we could transport timber by sea. My only response to that suggestion is that that there is no sea at Eskdalemuir or at Kielder. The only transport links are by road or rail. We have to do something about those links.

17:33

Alasdair Morgan (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP): My interest in the subject stems not so much from the fact that my mother's maiden name is Wood as from the fact that Galloway and Upper Nithsdale is the most heavily afforested constituency in Scotland. Alex Fergusson gave us the figures that tell us why forestry is so important to the Scottish economy, not only in terms of harvesting, but in terms of the downstream industries such as sawmilling. The Howies sawmill is one of the most high-tech operations in the UK, if not in Europe. Forestry is also important for tourism.

There is a downside to forestry, however. Alex Fergusson alluded to the effect that some of the early, ill-advised plantings had on our waterways. The increased acidity that resulted from those plantings had a disastrous effect on many of our lochs and trout and salmon rivers, which are only just beginning to recover. There is not much evidence to suggest that the new forestry techniques have been effective in that respect. It is going to take some time to turn that situation around.

I continually get complaints in my mailbag about timber lorries travelling in convoy and travelling too fast on narrow roads. To a large extent, that is not the fault of the industry, which is forced to use those roads because there is no other way of getting the timber out. As the activity is legitimate and valuable, we have to find a way of easing the industry's problems.

Members have mentioned the issue of rail and the Kielder forest. I understand that a railhead is either operating or is about to operate at Barrhill. It is a source of some disappointment that proposals to reinstate the old Glasgow and South Western Railway line from Dumfries as far as Dalbeattie—which would have served not so much the input as the output from Howies sawmill—have never come to anything. Such a development would be valuable.

However, roads are essential to solving the problem. It is difficult for rural local authorities to fund road improvements, because maintenance is a continuous problem. One cannot just fix a road and forget about it; because the heavy vehicles take a punishing toll on roads, one has to keep fixing them. I take it that the minister will say that

Dumfries and Galloway Council probably does not spend its grant-aided expenditure allocation on roads. However, that ignores some of the financial realities that local authorities face, especially in areas with low-wage economies where the option of putting up the rates might not be entertained. Moreover, I wonder whether the GAE allocation for roads takes account of the much higher pounding that is taken by minor roads in forested rural areas as opposed to minor roads elsewhere that have no timber traffic. I hope that the minister will be able to tell us how we can work together to resolve such problems, because the industry is vital for rural Scotland.

We cannot postpone considering the issue. With most trees, there is a window of opportunity in which they can be harvested. If we go beyond a certain time, those trees are effectively worthless.

17:36

Ian Jenkins (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): I will not keep the chamber long. I live in the Tweed valley and have watched the landscape changing as the trees have taken water from the river. Trees that were planted when I moved to Peebles are now being harvested and, travelling to Edinburgh every day, I can now see the fine view of the Pentlands as I reach Leadburn.

I endorse Christine Grahame's comments about rail opportunities. Transporting timber is part of the picture. Although the Kielder line is a branch line—so to speak—we want it to be part of the main line that runs from Edinburgh to Carlisle.

Like other members, I receive genuine complaints from constituents about the heavy traffic through villages—in my case, Ettrickbridge—road safety problems and the damage that the timber lorries do to roads. We must attend to that accelerating problem.

As I have nothing different to say from other members, I will not go on at great length. I simply point out that we must all work together to solve the problem. The timber companies, local authorities and, clearly, the Executive have their parts to play. Although I hope that no transport options, including rail, will be omitted or forgotten in discussions, roads are certainly at the heart of the issue.

17:38

Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): As a Highlands and Islands member living in Argyll, I add my voice to those who are worried about getting timber without ruining our rural roads any further.

Earlier in the parliamentary session, I gave a

speech arguing that the transport of timber by ship from Ardrishaig, which had taken place in the past, should be reinstated. I am glad to say that that happened—credit must go to the former Minister for Transport and the Environment, Sarah Boyack, for proceeding with the proposal. Thousands of tonnes have now been carried by ship, which has saved many millions of road miles. Huge timber lorries, along with fish farm lorries and trucks carrying enormously heavy loads of turbines for the new wind farm industry, completely churn up local roads, which were not built to carry such loads. I congratulate Forest Enterprise on linking many of its internal forest roads, which means that trips to the port are as short as possible.

I ask the minister to listen to the Scottish Gamekeepers Association about the management of deer in Forest Enterprise areas. Decent march fencing should be used as a method of keeping deer out of young woodlands. That would prevent the internal and scandalous slaughter of deer by shooting that takes place nearly all the year round.

Forestry was, and still is, an important employer in Scotland. However, more should be done to develop and open up the sporting and leisure facilities that exist in Forest Enterprise areas. I know of two villages in the Loch Awe area of Argyll that used to have many forestry employees. However, as the felling was contracted out, the level of employment also fell and now hardly any forestry workers live in those villages. It would be good if Forest Enterprise were encouraged to make more of the biodiversity that can undoubtedly exist in its enormous landholdings in Scotland. It has much more to offer than the monoculture of blanket Sitka spruce, which stifles life when it canopies.

17:40

The Deputy Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Allan Wilson): I thank Alex Fergusson for securing this evening's debate. In response to Fergus Ewing's plea—although I am not the arbiter of such matters, as he knows—I can tell him that I would be happy to debate the subject more formally, either as an Executive motion or if it is raised during Opposition time.

The total value of forestry and wood processing to the Scottish economy is more than £800 million, once account is taken of the knock-on effects in the wider economy. It is estimated that the forest industry in Scotland invests around £60 million per annum in new processing capacity. As a result of the Scottish forest industries cluster, an additional £100 million of investment is envisaged over the next five years. The Scottish forest industries cluster plays an important part in delivering our forestry strategy, particularly in relation to maximising the value to the Scottish economy of

the wood resource that will become available over the next 20 years.

About 4 million cu m of timber are harvested each year in Scotland. An increase of around two thirds in the availability of harvestable timber in Scotland is forecast over the next 15 years. That should lead to the creation of new jobs and significant new processing investment.

Mr McGrigor: The price of timber is such that the industry is not making any money. Is that situation being caused by imports? What, in the minister's opinion, is the reason for the low price?

Allan Wilson: The price of timber is closely related to the exchange rate. I believe that the short or medium-term solution will emerge when we examine convergence criteria for joining the euro.

Like other members who have spoken this evening, I recognise that the growing success of the timber industry in Scotland is leading to a significant increase in the number of timber lorries using rural roads and that, in many cases, those roads were not designed to accommodate that amount of heavy traffic. It is therefore important to try to develop local solutions, not least to help reduce the impact of timber traffic on local communities. That is why we welcome the development of agreed route maps for timber transport.

I also recognise the problem of local roads funding for councils' maintenance of timber transport routes. However, as Alasdair Morgan correctly predicted, the special need for maintaining forest roads is already taken into account, as appropriate, in setting the levels of the single block allocation from Scottish ministers for capital expenditure on a number of services including roads and transport. Councils have complete discretion, as I believe they should, to decide on their priorities and to allocate those funds to individual projects accordingly.

Alex Fergusson raised the question of Polbae, and I am happy to look into the matter. I have not had sight of his letter yet, but I understand that local dialogue is taking place. Dumfries and Galloway Council's capital allocation is up 34.3 per cent and its revenue allocation is up 16.81 per cent, so weight restrictions are, properly, entirely a matter for the council.

More generally, an extra £70 million is being made available in capital allocations across Scotland over the next three years to March 2004 to tackle the backlog of repairs to local roads and bridges that many members have mentioned. A further £20 million in revenue funding has recently been made available for the financial year 2001-02 to further speed up councils' maintenance activity on local roads.

I was happy that Robin Harper, Ian Jenkins and even Christine Grahame introduced a degree of balance, when talking about investment in roads infrastructure, by mentioning transport by rail and—in the case of my constituency, if not David Mundell's—by sea. Following the 2000 spending review, the resources available for freight facilities grants were doubled to £36 million over the three-year period from 2001-02 to 2003-04. Those grants are available to companies that wish to move freight, which obviously includes timber.

I am pleased that progress has been made. The Executive has identified the development of timber transport infrastructure as a priority for action through the strategy. Through the freight facilities grant, we have also been able to support initiatives to move timber traffic off the public highway. Through the Forestry Commission, the Executive has worked with the timber industry and sought the close involvement of local authorities through timber transport groups and the timber transport forum, a meeting of which I attended earlier this month.

In the light of the debate, I will ask the Forestry Commission to continue to support timber transport groups. As part of the review of the woodland grant scheme, I have today written to Alex Fergusson, as convener of the Rural Development Committee, to draw his attention to the steering group's report. He should receive my letter tomorrow.

In conclusion and in response to Alex Fergusson's motion and the general mood of consensus that has broken out in the chamber—

Alex Fergusson: Until the minister started to speak. [*Laughter.*]

Allan Wilson: It is always good to reach consensus as our final act—at least our final act in Aberdeen. A meeting between the Executive, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities' rural affairs committee and representatives of the forestry industry would be appropriate and could identify productive ways forward. Tomorrow, I will write to COSLA to offer a meeting to progress discussions.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We have reached the end of our business in Aberdeen. As the Bon Accord toast puts it:

"Glad to meet,
Sad to part,
Glad to meet again."

Meeting closed at 17:47.

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