

# **MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT**

Thursday 7 November 2002

Session 1

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# Scottish Parliament

Thursday 7 November 2002

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

## Housing

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr Murray Tosh):** Good morning. The first item of business is a statement on housing by Margaret Curran. The minister will take questions at the end of the statement, so there should be no interventions.

09:30

**The Minister for Social Justice (Ms Margaret Curran):** Last year saw the passage of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001, which is one of the most radical pieces of legislation that the Parliament has passed. The implementation of the act is well under way and is bringing about many improvements to Scottish social housing. We have funded 21,000 affordable houses since 1999 and the ballots that have been conducted will result in 100,000 council homes being transferred under the community ownership policy, which will lead to £2 billion of investment in the next 10 years. The recent Homelessness etc (Scotland) Bill is further proof of our determination to tackle head on the housing and social problems that have beset Scotland for generations.

Excellent progress is being made on many fronts. I intend to describe how, in a number of important ways, we plan to build on what we have already achieved. The measures that I will announce underline our commitment to social housing. They will offer greater diversity in the available options for landlords and tenants. In all our housing policies, we put tenants' interests first. The best way in which to do that is to give tenants a real say in the decisions that affect their homes, and we remain firmly committed to that objective. At the same time, we want to improve the efficiency of the sector and we will work with local authorities to improve the way in which they carry out their investment and management.

Through constituency work, members of the Scottish Parliament are well aware of the poor state of some council housing and of the impact that it has on those who live in it. Too much of our social housing is not up to the standards that we should expect a modern country to provide. I believe that we lack an objective national quality standard that covers all our social housing. Such standards have been established in England and Wales and around 20 Scottish local authorities

have established their own standards. The Chartered Institute of Housing in Scotland and Shelter Scotland recently called for a standard.

I believe that it makes a great deal of sense to have a standard and I propose to consult local authorities, registered social landlords and others on the development of a new Scottish standard for social housing. As part of our consultation, I shall take the views of social landlords on what is a realistic target date to meet the standard and what interim milestones should be set. We want the setting of the target date to be informed by the Scottish house condition survey, which is under way and which will report next year.

We want local authorities to take account of the new standard in the local housing strategies that they are preparing and we will discuss that with them further. When the information is to hand, I will invite councils and RSLs to submit their plans for meeting the standard and how that will be funded. I will describe in a moment the new funding mechanisms that will be available. The development of the new standard will be tied to the housing improvement task force's work.

The whole-stock transfer of council housing remains the central plank of our housing policy. Transfers provide the necessary investment to bring social housing up to the new standard and to put tenants at the centre of the decision-making process. Debt write-off remains available only for whole-stock transfers and is a result of our partnership with HM Treasury to secure considerable investment resources for social housing in Scotland. For many authorities, transfers will be the only way in which to lever in the necessary investment and to get that sooner rather than later. Transfers will also remain the most effective use of the Executive's resources because of the investment that they unlock.

It is important that we ensure that funding for housing achieves the maximum effect and provides the best value for money. Transfers are still the best way forward for local authorities to regenerate council housing. For example, in Glasgow, £1.6 billion will be invested in the next decade to provide every tenant with a warm, dry, affordable home. That level of investment would have been impossible if tenants had not voted for change.

Considerable progress has been made on the current transfers. We have learnt a lot and the time is right to apply those lessons to ensure that the transfer process works as speedily and as efficiently as possible. Therefore, we will review and consider improvements to the transfer process to help councils to proceed with future transfers as effectively as possible. In doing so, we will consult widely in the sector.

Stock transfer already brings many benefits, but I want to consider how we can further incentivise local authorities to go down the transfer route. One area in which we can do more is in linking the investment from housing transfers with wider community regeneration efforts. We will consider ways in which other spending can be made available to local authorities to complement housing transfers as part of comprehensive area renewal. I will announce the outcome of the review and details of the use of resources in January.

The benefits of whole-stock transfers are self-evident; the benefits of partial transfers that receive new housing partnership funding are less evident. We want councils to reach strategic decisions that cover all their houses. The NHP bidding process has perhaps not always led to the most effective use of the limited resources that are available. Therefore, I have decided that there will be no further NHP bidding rounds for partial transfers. Councils will still be able to seek funding from Communities Scotland for partial transfers if they form part of a strategic local housing strategy.

Although community ownership delivers a raft of benefits, it is becoming clear that, for some local authorities, transfer is not necessarily the only option in their circumstances. Representations have been made to me suggesting that we must offer those authorities something other than a choice between transfer and the status quo. I have considered those representations carefully and, as a result, I can announce that I intend to bring local authority housing capital finance within the new prudential regime that has been announced for the rest of local authority finance.

That means that, in future, local authorities will decide for themselves what is an affordable and prudent level of borrowing in their financial circumstances. The change will take effect from April 2004, subject to the passage of the Local Government in Scotland Bill. The move to a prudential regime for housing will not change the choices that face authorities that have significant debt levels, high investment needs and high rents. For them, stock transfer will remain the best option.

I stress that the point of the prudential regime is to delegate to local authorities decisions on prudent levels of borrowing. It will be up to individual councils to decide what, if any, additional borrowing the prudential regime might permit, but our estimates suggest that the prudential regime might release £200 million of extra investment for Scottish council housing. At the end of the day, councils will need to take full responsibility for their housing debt. They must ensure that the debt remains at manageable and affordable levels and that it does not place an unsustainable burden on current or future tenants.

As happens at present, borrowing will have to be funded out of rents, which means that, in setting borrowing limits, councils will need to ensure that rents are kept at responsible and affordable levels. I want local authorities to take a more businesslike approach to planning their housing investment and I will work with them on that as part of the move to the prudential regime.

I also intend to change the arrangements for funding local authority expenditure on private housing. We plan to replace borrowing consents with grant assistance that will be earmarked specifically for private sector housing purposes. We will consult the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities on the details of those changes. The total resources for expenditure in the area, including the implementation of the housing improvement task force's work, will be £215 million in the three years to 2005-06.

From my discussions with councils, I am aware that many of them have innovative ideas for alternative funding mechanisms and for different ways in which the housing stock might be managed. It would be worth while for us to explore further with councils whether those and other approaches can be developed in the Scottish context. I am not being prescriptive about the alternatives, but to be worth while, it must be shown how they can promote improved tenant involvement, deliver the necessary investment and support effective and transparent management. As part of the consultation on the new quality standard, I propose to invite local authorities and others to suggest innovative approaches that satisfy the criteria that I have just set out.

One specific issue that we must discuss with local authorities is the treatment of capital receipts and the set-aside rules. The move to a prudential regime means that the current rules must be revisited and are unlikely to remain relevant. We will take councils' views on that when they have considered the full consequences for their finances of moving to the prudential regime.

The changes that I have proposed will tackle Scotland's housing quality problems head on. They are a major evolution in housing policy that builds upon and complements the central policy of community ownership.

We have listened to local authorities as they have tried to find ways to tackle their housing problems and we are working in partnership with them to deliver a better deal for tenants. We have answered local authority calls to provide other options for many of the issues that we face. I look forward to answering members' questions.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The minister will now take questions on her statement. The list of members who wish to ask questions is

lengthening, so I shall allow around 30 minutes for questions. We will move to the next item of business at about 10:15.

**Mr Kenneth Gibson (Glasgow) (SNP):** I warmly welcome the minister's statement and thank her for providing me with a copy of it in advance. In its plans to adopt a Scottish social rented housing standard, the Executive is following the lead of the SNP, which adopted that policy at its annual conference this year—although we are clearly further advanced than the Executive on the issue as we already have a timetable in place for its introduction. Similarly, the Executive's intention to extend the prudential borrowing regime to housing was whole-heartedly endorsed by the SNP in Inverness, and we agreed the issue of grants last month. However, the grant assistance over three years that the Executive proposes is half the level, in real terms, that new Labour inherited.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Will you come to the questions now?

**Mr Gibson:** Yes. We usually have a preamble.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** No—

**Mr Gibson:** I seem to remember Mr McLetchie being given plenty of leeway when he is speaking.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Mr McLetchie has not spoken this morning—you have. A lot of members want to speak and I would be grateful if you could come to your questions.

**Mr Gibson:** There seems to be one rule for one member and another rule for others.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Order. Come to the questions, Mr Gibson.

**Mr Gibson:** Over what period does the Executive intend to consult local authorities on its new-found flexibility over housing capital receipt set-aside? Local authorities with low debt burdens must be relieved of that as soon as possible, if the Executive decides to proceed with abolishing housing capital receipt set-aside.

Does the Executive plan to restore the 30 per cent cut in the Communities Scotland approved development programme, which is now running at £100 million less than it was when new Labour came to power?

Taking into account the concern of the Social Justice Committee that the future supply of affordable housing will not meet the rising demand, will the minister assure us that the Executive will be able to meet Scotland's housing needs fully, given the record level of homelessness over which the Executive now presides?

**Ms Curran:** Kenny Gibson raises a range of issues. I hope that the Presiding Officer will allow

me to respond to the preamble that was not quite a question, as I feel obliged to address some of those issues.

Mr Gibson referred to the SNP conference, which seems to have been an interesting experience. The conference passed a resolution that all stock should be located in attractive environments by 2013. That is an interesting policy, and I look forward to the SNP's definition of an attractive environment. The SNP conference also resolved that housing improvement and repair grants should not be means tested. I will be interested to see the implications of that for the Scottish housing budget and the grants that the party intends to introduce.

I made it abundantly clear in my statement that we intend to consult local authorities on a variety of issues. We will be flexible in doing that. I will have serious discussions with local authorities and, as I have said, I will come back to the Parliament in January with a series of announcements about where we are with that. The prudential borrowing regime will not be introduced until April 2004, and the housing capital receipt set-aside rules will not be changed until then. That gives us enough time to have proper consultation.

There are huge issues about resources, which have been debated many times. The acts of the Labour Government at Westminster and the acts of the Labour-Liberal Democrat coalition have introduced substantial increases in the housing budget and in housing supply. We have been honest about the challenges that exist in Scottish housing and we are facing up to them today. It has been the biggest reinvigoration in housing for many generations, and we have fundamentally addressed the issues of resources and supply in increasing the budgets.

**Mrs Lyndsay McIntosh (Central Scotland) (Con):** I apologise for not quite being ready. The minister was very quick off the mark this morning.

**Ms Curran:** It is not like me.

**Mrs McIntosh:** Yes, it is. The minister is very fast.

On behalf of the Scottish Conservatives, I welcome the minister's statement and thank her for the courtesy of sending me an advance copy of it.

Although the Conservatives believe that home ownership is something to which most people aspire, and we proved our commitment to that aspiration by introducing right-to-buy legislation—one of our greatest pieces of legislation—we recognise that there will always be a need for social rented housing. We agree that there ought to be a standard.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Can we have a question, please?

**Mrs McIntosh:** I have just got there. Will the minister tell us a little more about that standard? Are we talking about several standards? Does she refer to standards that are in existence south of the border or to something completely different?

The minister proposes to review and reconsider improvements in the transfer process. That would be a sensible precaution to take, in the light of the experience in Glasgow. However, I assume that she already knows what needs to be done. I hope that the consultation will not be an empty paper-chase for organisations such as the CIHS. I suspect that the minister knows what they are looking for from the standard.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Is there another question?

**Mrs McIntosh:** I was merely going to comment that delegated responsibility—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** This is not a comment session; it is a question session. I would be grateful if you could come to your next question.

**Mrs McIntosh:** Are we really talking about proper devolution to local authorities?

**Ms Curran:** Lyndsay McIntosh raises several questions. Yes, we have some idea about what we expect the standard to include. The standard will cross-refer to the work of the housing improvement task force. I pay tribute to the task force, which has undertaken a considerable amount of detailed work on what the standard will be. We imagine that it will include factors such as thermal efficiency, the condition of bathrooms and kitchens, adaptations for people with special needs, and so on. However, our minds are not absolutely set and we will take views on what the standard should include. I have tried to make it clear—and the Minister for Finance and Public Services would be the first to agree with me—that we will be realistic and effective in delivering the standard. It is not purely aspirational; it will be delivered. Nonetheless, we recognise the challenges that it poses. We believe that we can meet them.

I have no intention of engaging in an empty consultation exercise. That would be a waste of my time and of everybody else's time. The consultation will be genuine, as I hope that I have proved in the past.

Lyndsay McIntosh spoke about learning about the stock transfer process. I have considerable experience of stock transfers throughout Scotland, in different situations. As I said in my statement, they are a great option for many local authorities. Nonetheless, we need to improve the process and

the improvements are readily available. I will, of course, talk to other people and consider the views of different agencies in improving the process. It is such a good deal for tenants that we must bring them the benefits of it as soon as possible.

**Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD):** On behalf of the Liberal Democrats, I welcome the minister's comprehensive statement.

The introduction of prudential borrowing is a welcome widening of the options. First, will the minister ensure that, in the arrangements that are made for prudential borrowing, the emphasis is placed on councils' duty to consider the long-term maintenance of their properties? That has been the big failure of public housing in the past.

Secondly, will the minister indicate whether there is to be a target for the number of new or rehabilitated houses that result from the new resources that are made available through prudential borrowing?

Thirdly, will the national standard be the same as the index of housing quality, which has been talked about before, or is it a third standard that is somewhere between it and the tolerable standard?

Finally, with regard to the important announcement about private sector housing, does the Executive intend to add increased resources over time? That will be the most challenging area, because of the state of the tenement stock throughout Scotland.

**Ms Curran:** Is that all?

**Robert Brown:** Yes.

**Ms Curran:** We can always rely on Robert Brown to ask detailed questions. Legal training has something to answer for. I will do my best to answer all of them. If I do not give all the details that he wants, I shall be more than happy to get back to him.

Long-term maintenance is central to the changes that we are trying to introduce. Local authorities agree with us on that. Stock transfer reveals clearly that we must move to long-term planning in housing expenditure—not just of the resources that are available, but by projecting long-term demand and housing conditions. Much of the information that is required to do that is not as robust as it should be. Therefore, we are trying to drive all key partners towards a more businesslike approach, whereby they take a longer-term view of the sustainability of their stock instead of just complying with the short-term rules. Local authorities sometimes say that they have not been liberated enough to do long-term planning, so we are trying to establish a more devolved relationship with local authorities.



On Robert Brown's point on the index of housing quality, we are building on previous work. Through the Social Justice Committee's work and my experience, we understand the issues in housing quality and the need to set a standard. The housing improvement task force will continue to consider the review of the tolerable standard, which is a condemnatory standard. The new standard will be more than that. We want a standard that will fulfil people's expectation of being able to live in a decent standard of council housing.

On available resources for the private sector, new money is available in the form of an extra £65 million, compared with current expenditure, over the three years from 2003-04 to 2005-06. Robert Brown's other point, if I picked it up properly, was on the need to ensure proper targets and balance in relation to housing supply. That is part of the business planning approach that we are trying to take. We acknowledge that different local authorities have different issues. For example, in Edinburgh and in many rural areas the supply of new housing is a significant issue.

During the first session of the Parliament, we have moved to a position of giving more strategic support to housing issues through local housing strategies, so that available resources can be deployed to maximum effect to meet the different needs of different local authorities. We feel that that is a key part of the jigsaw, which will allow all key housing partners to move to strategic deployment and, I hope, meet the challenges that lie ahead of us.

**Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab):** I refer to the minister's comments about the private sector. The minister will be aware of the anxieties of some owner-occupiers of properties that were bought under the right to buy about the implication for them of Glasgow's housing stock transfer and of the significant investment in Glasgow's council housing that will follow from that. What assurances can the minister give that the new grant system for the private sector will be targeted at those owner-occupiers and will be substantial enough for them to gain from housing improvements? Can she also assure us that such households will not operate as a local barrier to those important developments?

**Ms Curran:** Johann Lamont, who is the convener of the Social Justice Committee, has raised specific issues about Glasgow. She will know that I am close to many of the issues in Glasgow and that, as a Glasgow MSP, I have received many representations about the important issue to which she referred. I believe that the housing policy that has been developed for Glasgow addresses that issue.

We acknowledge that not only in stock transfer situations but throughout Scotland people in the

owner-occupied sector might not have the resources to meet needs. I have reflected that issue in my policy statement. However, that must be balanced by our belief—which differs strongly from the belief of the nationalists—that people are responsible for improving their houses. We cannot let people escape that responsibility. It is not the Scottish Government's role to subsidise private sector development in that way.

We acknowledge that particular needs must be met. That is why we will means test them and ensure that the money properly goes to those who are most in need, at whom the resources should be targeted. That position is in keeping with Robert Brown's point.

**Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP):** I, too, welcome the policy statement, which is a tribute to the task force and all who helped its work.

I have two quick points. The first is to pick up on what the minister said about people's responsibility to maintain and improve their houses. Many people in Scotland are in private rented stock that is below tolerable standard. It is landlords' responsibility to ensure that they take rent for a decent house. Has consideration been given to expanding the decency standard to include houses in the private rented sector? That would tie in with the issue of tenement law. When is legislation likely to be introduced?

On prudential borrowing, obviously only some local authorities will be able to take advantage of the loosening of the rules. Other authorities will not be able to do so and stock transfer would seem to be the only option for them. If a council dug in its heels and said that it did not want to proceed with stock transfer, what could we do to ensure that its tenants are not stuck in the middle and do not fail to get the benefits of what the minister has announced?

**Ms Curran:** Linda Fabiani raised several issues, one of which is the private rented sector. The housing improvement task force, with whose work I know Linda Fabiani is familiar, is considering a standard for the private rented sector. We will try to cross-refer the work on the Scottish standard for social housing with the task force's work on the private rented sector to ascertain whether the two standards that are being developed have aspects in common.

Much of the detailed work of the housing improvement task force will be extremely helpful in addressing those issues. As Linda Fabiani knows, the task force will report on its work in spring 2003. That report will address matters such as tenement law, with which the task force is grappling just now.

Linda Fabiani's point about the prudential regime highlights a significant issue. Some local

authorities might dig their heels in, but I cannot imagine local authorities not welcoming today's statement. Most local authorities act responsibly in delivering facilities to their tenants and will be aware of the range of available options. We always want to hear what local authorities want to say. However, if local authorities cannot lever in resources from the available options, they are failing their tenants and must come to terms with the issues that face them.

The Executive is unequivocal in its view that there are substantial resources and mechanisms to allow the new standard to be achieved and for tenants to have affordable, warm, dry homes that are fit for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We expect local authorities to operate within the available mechanisms. Most local authorities are prudent and sensible and are driven to improve standards for their tenants, and they will strongly welcome the new standard and will use the available options.

It would be disingenuous at best for us to pretend that there are hidden resources that we can just throw at local authorities. That is why, when we go into the election, all our proposals will be fully costed. We will ensure that tenants and voters get facts when deciding for whom to vote. We must take politics forward in Scotland by giving people real information and choices. I think that we have finally done that for housing in Scotland.

**Mr John Home Robertson (East Lothian) (Lab):** I congratulate the minister on her excellent achievement of extending the prudential borrowing system. Does she recall that East Lothian is an area where stock transfer could not possibly make sense and where there is a truly desperate need for more affordable rented housing? East Lothian has 6,000 people stuck on the waiting list and there are only 400 re-lets each year.

East Lothian Council will have virtually cleared its housing capital debt by 2004, so I sincerely hope that the council will be able to implement the Executive's excellent new policy and build more affordable rented houses as soon as possible. Will the minister arrange for an early meeting between her officials and local authorities such as East Lothian Council, which might be able to build new rented houses?

**Ms Curran:** I am always happy to direct officials to do things and of course they can do what Mr Home Robertson suggested. I thought that he was going to ask me to meet with East Lothian Council and I was going to say that I would be happy to do so.

**Mr Home Robertson:** The minister would be welcome.

**Ms Curran:** I am welcome, am I?

We have all talked in the chamber until we are hoarse about the fact that Scotland's housing policy has never been that one size fits all. The Executive has always said that stock transfer is one option among many and that it does not make sense for some local authorities. The Executive has always been honest, working in partnership with the Westminster Government, about the fact that we would only ever change financial rules when we thought that it was prudent and in the interests of the Scottish budget and the Scottish people to do so.

We will not be irresponsible with the resources that are at our disposal and we must manage them properly. That is why we are introducing prudential borrowing, which will be an attractive policy for East Lothian Council in particular. I hope that I will join my officials at a meeting with East Lothian Council and that John Home Robertson will also be there.

**Richard Lochhead (North-East Scotland) (SNP):** I thank the minister for her statement and turn her attention to the quality and availability of housing in our rural communities. Is she aware that many landed estates in rural Scotland would rather hold on to scores of empty houses than make them available to local young people who want to continue to live and work in the areas where they were born? What steps is she taking to ensure that that housing is made available to local people, not just for renting but for ownership, so that local young people can commit their futures to their rural communities?

**Ms Curran:** I have taken the issue of rural housing seriously since I became deputy minister. I think that I answered a question from John Farquhar Munro on the issue last week at question time. I have visited many rural areas since I have been in post and have worked closely with Communities Scotland on the range of options that it delivers. I strongly congratulate Communities Scotland for the delivery of that work.

At question time last week I talked about the successful low-cost home-ownership strategies that we developed, but those do not answer all the problems and we need to address other issues. However, I think that the money that we announced today and the outcome agreements that will be in place between Communities Scotland and local authorities to ensure that private sector money gets invested properly begin to address the problem.

In my time in office, I have also met a number of rural landlords to ensure that they are addressing housing needs within their areas. We now have a variety of mechanisms to address such issues. Today's announcement will allow local authorities fundamentally to address the issue of supply within their area.

At the centre of our housing policy is a recognition that Scotland is a diverse country that has different needs in different parts, so it is proper that we devolve power to local authorities and work in partnership with other sectors to ensure that housing needs are addressed within the different rural communities, which are quite different from one another. Having done a lot of work with the islands and such like, I think that we now have a package of measures that will begin to address those issues fundamentally.

**Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** I welcome the minister's statement and the investment in private housing stock, but I want to push the minister a wee bit further on what she said in her answer to Johann Lamont about how the investment will work. I welcome the fact that the investment will be means tested and will go to those who are most in need, but as those most in need are often elderly, will the minister work with organisations such as Age Concern to ensure that the elderly are aware that the money is available? Also, will she confirm that the money will be ring fenced so that it cannot be used for other purposes, such as servicing housing debt?

**Ms Curran:** We want the funding to be targeted. That is a fundamental issue. I will ensure that the member gets detailed information about this, but the way in which the investment will work is that the money will be allocated to local authorities, which will be required to ensure that the money is spent on what is set out in the outcome agreements that they will have agreed with Communities Scotland. That process will determine the allocations for the next year. In a sense, that will ensure that the money is targeted, given the concern that money has not always been targeted at that sector.

Rhoda Grant's suggestion about working with Age Concern is valuable, as there is a need to ensure that elderly citizens are properly informed about what their expectations should be. We also need to encourage an environment in Scotland in which key organisations work with local authorities to ensure that issues are resolved, but I think that we can make progress on that effectively.

**John Farquhar Munro (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD):** On behalf of the Liberal Democrats, I welcome this morning's statement from the minister. Much of what it contained is indeed to be welcomed. I had one reservation, but the minister may have answered my question in her response to John Home Robertson. In light of Highland Council's recent statement suggesting that the lack of affordable housing in the private and rented sectors causes young families in rural Scotland particular difficulties, will she assure me that rurality will be taken into consideration in allocating funding to councils, so that that difficulty might be addressed?

**Ms Curran:** The scheme that we have introduced will enable that to happen. Local authorities will determine what are the best options available to raise the necessary investment to address the housing issues that they have determined to prioritise. The prudential regime will allow them that option.

I will not pretend that all difficult political decisions will thereby evaporate, as that might not be the case. Some local authorities face considerable housing problems because of the scale of their debt, the level of their rents and the level of the investment that is required. We cannot let those problems continue and we must fundamentally address them. For such local authorities, stock transfer may be the best means of levering in finance; for others, the prudential regime may offer opportunities for the local authority itself to invest, which would then allow the authority to determine that rurality is a key issue. The prudential regime will allow the decision making to be taken at that level.

As housing minister, I would say that rurality is a strong feature of our general approach to housing. Both John Farquhar Munro and I are committed to ensuring that we have a Scottish housing policy that reflects Scotland, so it is obvious that the rural dimension must be critical. I hope that we are beginning properly to address those issues.

**Cathie Craigie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab):** As well as welcoming the minister's statement this morning, I welcome the emphasis that the Scottish Executive has placed on housing. After many years of campaigning, we now rightly have housing well up the political ladder.

The minister mentioned capital receipts and the changes to the set-aside rules, which were referred to by John Home Robertson in connection with East Lothian Council. I know that North Lanarkshire Council has been lobbying the minister quite hard to emphasise the quality of well-maintained housing that it can provide with low debt, low rents and the involvement of tenants at every level. Will the changes to the treatment of capital receipts and set-aside rules allow North Lanarkshire Council to invest more in its stock?

The minister also spoke about the intention to consult on the development of a Scottish standard for social housing. I know that the housing improvement task force is looking at the private sector, which other colleagues have mentioned, but the need to expand the regulations to establish standards within the private sector is an issue that is very much in the minds of members whose constituencies contain high numbers of private sector houses.

**Ms Curran:** During the time of the Scottish Parliament, issues have accumulated in our

debates on housing. Indeed, Alex Neil was a member of the Social Inclusion, Housing and Voluntary Sector Committee when we first considered many of the issues. There is a genuine understanding across the Parliament that there is a fundamental need for us to come to terms with the issues, but that is why the housing improvement task force was established and why it has gone into its work in such depth. As Cathie Craigie will know, North Lanarkshire Council is represented on the task force and has itself raised such issues.

Notwithstanding what has been announced today, I expect that the housing improvement task force's report will have something to add about what work needs to be done in the private sector. However, today's announcement is a critical component of what has been asked for by local authorities, which have spoken about the need to move forward.

Like every previous housing minister, I have received strong and robust representations from local authorities on the set-aside rules. We will not relent in our determination to deal with debt in Scottish housing. If it is not dealt with, it will be paid for in some way or another, so it simply must be addressed. However, we believe that the prudential regime will allow us to consider the issue differently, as it will allow local authorities to address the issue of how they manage their debt and how they manage their resources. Within that context, the capital set-aside rules essentially do not have the same relevance. The first issue to be dealt with is how the prudential regime for local authorities will work and within that context the capital set-aside rules will be discussed. The fact that we will be governed by the April 2004 deadline means that we will be able to talk to local authorities about that.

**Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con):** As ever, I do not doubt the minister's good intentions, but does she agree that, although it is all very well to set standards, the question of target dates must be resolved as a matter of urgency? We need to resolve the issue of the total expenditure that is likely to be incurred in bringing public sector housing up to the appropriate standard once that standard has been agreed. Will she liaise with her colleague the Minister for Parliamentary Business to ensure that the full figures are brought back to the Parliament so that they can be properly debated within an acceptable time scale?

**Ms Curran:** I am happy to give Bill Aitken that assurance. Not to have a full and open debate on such issues would serve nobody's purposes. The Executive has nothing to hide about the resources that we are making available for Scottish housing and we are willing to proclaim our success proudly. I am more than happy to give a

commitment to come back to Parliament. I am sure that if I chose not to do so, the Minister for Parliamentary Business would direct me otherwise.

I understand completely why Bill Aitken has raised the serious issue of the target dates, as that concerns how we lever in the resources, but that is why we have said that we want to introduce the new standard as competently and as efficiently as possible. We will not get into a bidding war—as some agencies or organisations might tempt us to do—on what the target date should be. We want whatever we do to make sense. The date should not be some implausible target that has been set by a politician with no true recognition of what is happening in the field.

I mentioned the Scottish house condition survey because that will give us a real sense of what the investment needs are and of what strategies must be put in place to meet the standard. That is why I said that we need to set an interim date and milestones that can be assessed so that we can know that we are going in the right direction. Matched to that is a clear and unequivocal understanding that standards must be met.

In a sense, that is the answer to the implication behind Rhoda Grant's question. We are now putting in place the mechanisms for local authorities to address the fundamental housing issues that we expect them to address. We will drive up standards and use all levers at our disposal to make sure that those standards are met. The targets and the milestones will be part of that, but I am sure that we will discuss this matter again.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I think that I will be able to get everybody in.

**Mr John McAllion (Dundee East) (Lab):** As the minister knows, the wind-up of the new towns was the only occasion when tenants were free to choose between transfer to a housing association and transfer to a local authority, and by an overwhelming majority they chose to transfer to a local authority. If the interests of tenants always come first, will the minister allow debt write-off to be tied to the transfer of council stock to a stand-alone housing company that is wholly owned by the council and freed by the debt write-off to borrow private capital on the strength of its housing revenue schemes? I know that tenants and council alike are calling for that in Dundee.

**Ms Curran:** For the life of me, I cannot as a socialist see the attraction of a housing company over a housing association. A housing association is a much more democratic institution. Nonetheless, I still think—

**Mr McAllion:** Will the minister put the tenants' choice first.

**Ms Curran:** I will answer the question; honestly, I will come to it. Through the housing association model we have seen more tenant involvement, more tenant empowerment and more tenant control than were ever envisaged under any other model. John McAllion and I have debated this issue over many years. I think that our positions will remain the same.

Nonetheless, in keeping with the spirit of what I just said, many local authorities genuinely want to involve their tenants and to examine different models. There are options for sophisticated levels of tenant participation in the local authority model that enable tenants to influence decision making. I have never argued against that. If possibilities exist, and if local authorities say to us, "We have a different model that allows us also to meet the standards that tenants expect," I will be open minded about it. However, I will not collude with local authorities that insist that their stock should stay under one model, irrespective of what the consequences are for all their tenants, whether that model drives up standards and whether it tackles issues such as dampness.

Our fundamental concern is for tenants in Scotland who demand, and will now get, decent housing standards. The best way to drive that is to allow them to make the decisions. If local authorities can deliver what tenants want, so be it, but we will drive up standards for tenants in Scotland.

**Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP):** I will follow on from John McAllion's point. Is there not a central contradiction in the minister's policy? On the one hand she says that one size does not fit all, and that the policy should be flexible enough to ensure that we get horses for courses. On the other hand, in her statement she said that local authorities' housing debt will not be written off unless they go down the stock transfer road that she tells them to go down. The minister cannot have it both ways. She cannot say, "We will be flexible," and on the other hand say, "You will get the debt written off only if you go down the stock transfer route."

My second point is on the important point in the minister's speech about linking housing investment to wider employment and other issues. We saw a report this week on child poverty and a report last week on unemployment. We know that there will be a shortage of 27,500 workers in the construction industry in the years to come. What discussions has the minister had with the Construction Industry Training Board and Scottish Enterprise on solving the skills crisis in the building trade?

**Ms Curran:** This is good fun. I am amazed that Alex Neil says that there is a central contradiction in my policy. He should address that comment to

Kenny Gibson and Linda Fabiani, because they strongly welcomed that policy. There is obviously some kind of double thinking going on in the SNP.

The time is now right for us to be honest with tenants, because the ordinary person in the street in Scotland understands that money cannot just be manufactured to promote a certain policy. We have said clearly that the standard of a large proportion of housing in all its diversity throughout Scotland is not acceptable. That is partly the Conservatives' fault, but we will come back to that another time.

Standards are not acceptable. Current financial regimes need to address a variety of methods to provide investment to enable housing to meet the standard. The debt profile in Scotland had to be fundamentally addressed. We could have buried our heads in the sand, but it would have done tenants a disservice if the fundamental issue of debt had not been addressed. Through our relationship with the Treasury, we have the most radical housing policy that has been developed in Scotland for generations. It allows debt to be written off, but also allows other opportunities to lever in investment.

Under Alex Neil's leadership—if that ever comes about—or in the Scotland that Alex Neil would want us to live in, he would expect the public purse to pay for everything. He could not possibly sustain the level of investment that is required to lift the debt and invest in housing. Glasgow is a case in point, which is why Linda Fabiani and Kenny Gibson ultimately supported the stock transfer in Glasgow. I presume that Alex Neil's policy would be to lift the £1 billion housing debt and to invest in housing, but he could not possibly find the proper resources to do that. Through our policy, we get the best of both worlds: the debt is lifted and we find the means to invest in Scottish housing. That is absolutely what tenants require.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I had not allowed for Alex Neil in my timing calculations. I have two members—

**Ms Curran:** Presiding Officer, I did not answer Alex Neil's second point. I got carried away.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I will allow this session to extend beyond the indicated time, but I would be grateful if the minister could answer the second question relatively briefly so that I can bring in Rhona Brankin and Kenneth Macintosh.

**Ms Curran:** I will be brief. I would never wish to fail to answer questions in the Parliament. As Alex Neil knows, I do my best. He may disagree with my answers, but I do answer questions.

I have had significant discussions on apprenticeship training with Glasgow City Council. I have also had a number of meetings with Iain

Gray, who has taken up a lot of the skills issues to do with construction jobs, in particular in relation to stock transfer.

**Rhona Brankin (Midlothian) (Lab):** Like other members, I welcome the announcement. I am pleased that the minister recognises the need for flexibility for local authorities.

As the minister will know, Midlothian Council in my constituency currently provides high-quality social housing, but it has major problems in meeting the demand for affordable housing. Could she tell us briefly what difference in practice her announcement will make for councils such as Midlothian Council? John Home Robertson invited the minister to visit East Lothian, so I invite the minister to Midlothian to see for herself the quality of the houses and to meet some of the tenants and, more important, some of the people who are on the rather long waiting lists. The minister could do that in a day.

**Ms Curran:** My diary is getting more exciting as the minutes pass. I would be happy to come to Midlothian. It is my understanding that the issues in the Lothians require the flexible approach that we are taking. Different local authorities face different housing issues. It is important that I communicate that I understand those different housing issues. The issue is not just the stereotypical rundown housing estate. I pay tribute to the many local authorities that provide high-quality housing and a high-quality service to tenants. It is important to put that on the record. I am happy to come to Midlothian to witness that.

The new regime will give local authorities the scope to prioritise their own housing strategies and to have investment that follows those strategies, depending on their local needs. Borrowing must be within the prudential regime, so it must be prudent and based on rents, because it would be unwise for councils to go to unsustainable rent levels. However, within that framework, councils will be allowed to determine their own priorities. There are many opportunities for local authorities such as Midlothian.

**Mr Kenneth Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab):** I am grateful that you let me in, Presiding Officer.

I assume that it was not the minister's trip to Busby and Barrhead on Saturday that was needed to persuade her to make today's announcement, but she will know from talking to residents there how welcome today's announcement will be. Without wishing to make the minister's diary too exciting, I ask her to find a space in her diary to return to Busby and Barrhead to talk to councillors Betty Cunningham, Alan Lafferty and Ian Forbes, in particular, about the proposals. Will she reassure me that those discussions will take place before April 2004 and the introduction of the prudential borrowing scheme?

Like Dundee, which my colleague John McAllion referred to, East Renfrewshire has a number of innovative ideas to fund council housing. Will the minister discuss those ideas with East Renfrewshire Council, and perhaps make clear the criteria? That council has already involved tenants hugely, but it might not necessarily be going down the housing association line, so it would welcome any criteria that the minister could provide on what would be appropriate. I welcome any further discussion on the set-aside rules, which will also be welcomed by tenants in East Renfrewshire.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I am grateful that you asked a short question, Mr Macintosh.

**Ms Curran:** Another invitation—this is getting more exciting. I notice that I did not receive any invitations from SNP members, but I will not take it personally.

I met Councillor Cunningham in Busby and Barrhead on Saturday, and I would be happy to go back to have, I hope, a less robust discussion. Hugh Henry recently met representatives of East Renfrewshire Council. Local authorities such as East Renfrewshire Council are beginning to consider different models of tenant involvement and we need to understand that. The member is well aware that we must operate within existing financial regimes. However, such ideas open up new possibilities for us and options for developing them exist.

Barrhead has significant housing issues that must be addressed. We need to talk about how the financial regimes will work. I am clear that we will have those discussions before the new regime is introduced and that we can talk about how the capital set-aside rules will work. The Executive's housing officials are engaging with many local authority officials so that we can work out the options for local authorities.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I will write to the minister with my questions.

**Ms Curran:** I hope that I will receive an invitation.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I give invitations regularly.

## Forestry

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr Murray Tosh):** The next item of business is a debate on motion S1M-3541, in the name of Allan Wilson, on forestry in Scotland, and on two amendments to that motion. I call Allan Wilson to speak, after he has shuffled his papers and sorted out his folders.

10:21

**The Deputy Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Allan Wilson):** Thank you for your patience, Presiding Officer.

We have made several announcements about forestry in recent weeks, so the debate is timely. Forestry is important to Scotland, although perhaps it is not as important as the Conservatives' amendment suggests. One sixth of our land is wooded. Forestry and primary wood processing provide jobs for about 10,000 of our fellow citizens, and every year about 2 million Scots visit a wood or forest as part of a recreational trip.

The industry contributes about £800 million to the Scottish economy, so it accounts for about 0.5 per cent of our gross domestic product. It is not our third biggest industry, as the Conservatives suggest, but its importance is proportionally much greater in rural areas. There is no doubt that we need a thriving forestry industry to promote the economic well-being of our rural areas. Well-designed woods and forests also make a valuable contribution to our environment by creating habitats for wildlife and enhancing our landscape.

The overarching principle of our Scottish forestry strategy, which was published two years ago in November 2000, is sustainability. Scottish forestry must contribute positively to sustainable development and meet internationally recognised standards of sustainable forest management. The other guiding principles are integration, creating positive value, community support and reflecting the rich diversity and local distinctiveness of different parts of Scotland.

The strategy identified five key directions for the industry. The industry should maximise the value to the Scottish economy of our wood resource, which will become available for harvesting in the next 20 years, when we expect production to double. It should create a diverse high-quality forest resource for the future. It should also ensure that forestry contributes positively to our environment, creates opportunities for more people to enjoy our trees, woods and forests and helps communities to benefit from woods and forests. The strategy also identified 23 priorities for action. At a Scottish forestry forum meeting later this month, we will publish a progress report on the implementation of our strategy.

Forestry is a devolved matter, but it was agreed at the time of devolution that the Forestry Commission should continue to deliver forestry policy. The commission became a cross-border public authority with its head office in Edinburgh. Three national offices were established, along with a Great Britain central core. Following a recent review, we agreed with ministerial colleagues in other Administrations that functions should shift significantly away from the centre to strengthened national offices for Scotland, England and Wales.

The national office for Scotland will act as the Scottish Executive's forestry department and be responsible for managing Scotland's national forests through a separate Forest Enterprise in Scotland. That will give us closer control over how our national forests are managed and ensure greater integration between forestry policy and wider Scottish Executive policies.

**Alasdair Morgan (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP):** Could some of the headquarters jobs in Edinburgh be moved to another part of Scotland, where they might be nearer the trees?

**Allan Wilson:** That is a fair point. I support the dispersal of civil service and Scottish Executive jobs. I understand that those jobs and their prospective dispersal will be the subject of review.

We will continue to work closely with Administrations south of the border on some issues. For example, forest research will continue to be funded directly from Whitehall, although the Scottish ministers, through the national office for Scotland, will have considerable influence over how research funding is spent.

**Rhona Brankin (Midlothian) (Lab):** Will the minister assure me that the northern research station that is situated near the Bush estate in Midlothian will be safe?

**Allan Wilson:** I will look into the research station's safety and answer the member's question in due course.

A ministerial committee is being established to bring together the ministers with responsibility for forestry in Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland. That committee will meet regularly to oversee the new arrangements, to discuss the handling of international issues and to agree on any other cross-cutting forestry issues on which collaboration is advantageous. I am developing a concordat between the Forestry Commission and the Executive to spell out how those arrangements will work in practice. The main changes will be implemented by April next year.

We have conducted a major review of the forestry and woodland grant schemes to ensure that the grants are properly aligned with the

Scottish forestry strategy's priorities. Subject to European Community approval, we plan to launch the Scottish forestry grants scheme in April next year. The new grant scheme was developed by a steering group that included representatives from the industry, farming and crofting interests, environment groups, local authorities, the Forestry Commission's national office for Scotland and the Scottish Executive's environment and rural affairs department.

A key recommendation of the group was that the use of our forestry grants should switch emphasis. At present, about three quarters of the money is allocated to forestry expansion and a quarter is for work to improve the environmental, social and economic value of existing forests. We intend to shift that balance significantly so that half the money will be used to improve existing forests and half will be used to fund new woodlands.

One feature of the new grant scheme will be better targeting of money for new woodlands. In September, I announced a £1.85 million package of locational premiums for central Scotland, Ayrshire, Grampian and the northern isles. I asked for details to be worked out through local consultation and I am happy to announce that Grampian forest forum has agreed that the locational premium for Grampian forest should be £1,500 per hectare. That sum will be available to farmers who want to diversify into forestry to create well-designed, productive woodlands of 10 to 30 hectares on their land. Overall, we are making provision of £26 million for forestry and woodland grants next year. That should be compared with our highest-ever expenditure on grants, which was £25 million in 2000-01.

We established the Scottish forest industries cluster to help continue the development of a strong forestry industry and to search for innovation in products and markets. The cluster is a partnership between Scottish Enterprise and the industry. Its key achievements include establishing a centre for timber engineering and developing stronger links between the wood-processing industry and wood users, including architects and people who specify buildings for procurement.

**Mrs Margaret Ewing (Moray) (SNP):** Wood processing is an important feature of the timber industry. Could the Executive's proposals reduce the amount of timber that is exported for processing rather than processed at home?

**Allan Wilson:** I will talk about adding value to the wood production process. I agree with the idea that we should ensure that much of that added value is created in Scotland, where the timber is produced.

The cluster is looking for new and less conventional ways of adding value to timber.

There is scope for making more use of wood for fuel. Practical seminars on that subject have taken place in different parts of Scotland and I am encouraged by the evidence from the projects that are under way.

There is no doubt that the past few years have been difficult for the industry. Timber and wood product prices are at historically low levels, which undoubtedly poses major challenges throughout the industry. It against that difficult background that the positive work of the Scottish forest industries cluster group is so encouraging.

We want to encourage more use of timber and to add value to that process. The Forestry Commission is contributing to the generic marketing campaign "wood. for good". Last month, the Forestry Commission, along with the Executive, Historic Scotland and the architecture profession, organised a very well-attended conference on timber and the built environment.

We recently submitted a bid to the European Union for a €885,000 project to investigate, with other nordic countries, ways of using external timber cladding in maritime climates. Following the world summit on sustainable development in Johannesburg, we agreed to examine ways of using our purchasing power to promote the purchase of wood products from sustainable sources.

Another difficult issue for the industry is the transportation of timber. There are places where the only access to forests is along minor roads, which were never designed for heavy use by timber traffic. I am pleased that the forestry industry is now working closely with local authorities to try to identify pragmatic solutions to those problems, including the preparation of agreed route maps and demonstration projects that are aimed at developing cost-effective road engineering solutions.

**Alex Fergusson (South of Scotland) (Con):** Does the minister think that part of that strategy should be the land locking of blocks of timber by the closure of roads to forestry transport?

**Allan Wilson:** I believe that those strategies are best worked out at the local level between the industry and local authorities, as that will produce solutions that are best suited to the local area. As the member knows because we were in Dumfries together, I launched the agreed routes map for Dumfries and Galloway and saw some of the imaginative engineering developments that are taking place in that area.

Where possible, more use is being made of sea and rail transport. That approach is being encouraged through our freight facilities grants. In January, I will meet representatives of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and the



forestry industry for further discussions on timber transport.

Forests are also important attractions for tourists and visitors to Scotland. As members know, we are running treefest Scotland 2002, which is a year-long initiative to celebrate Scotland's trees, woods and forests. During the year, more than 750 events are taking place throughout Scotland, including the Edinburgh treefest event in Inverleith park; tree in the park in Hamilton, which attracted 27,000 people over a weekend; and a major forestry machinery demonstration, which a number of MSPs attended. That demonstration attracted so many visitors that every hotel in that part of Dumfriesshire was fully booked and provided a massive injection of money into the local economy.

In Perthshire, the big tree country initiative has shown how joint promotional work can increase the value of the local forest heritage to our local tourist industry. How many members know that in Scotland we have the oldest living thing in Europe? *[Laughter.]* It is not Winnie Ewing; it is the Fortingall yew. In the Borders, Forest Enterprise is developing first-class mountain biking facilities to attract more visitors to the area.

Our recent spending review provided an additional £4 million for forest recreation facilities—especially in national parks—and improvements to the natural heritage value of Scotland's national forests. That significant injection of funding recognised the importance of trees to tourism.

The Scottish forestry strategy also aims to help communities benefit from woods and forests. At present, around 50 community woodland groups in Scotland control the ownership or management of about 20,000 hectares of woodland. A number of large-scale community purchases of woodland have been made possible through the Scottish land fund. To take forward that agenda, and to encourage more community involvement in forestry, the Forestry Commission has established a forestry for people advisory panel. Our proposed grant scheme will include grants to support community woodland initiatives, which I am particularly keen to develop in urban brownfield sites. Forest Enterprise will work closely with many community groups on those initiatives.

We must also ensure that Scotland's trees, woods and forests make a positive contribution to the environment. That has not always been the case and the work of the Forestry Commission in that respect was recently acknowledged by no less than the WWF, which presented the commission with its gift to the earth award in recognition of its substantial contribution to our national environment.

Our new grants scheme will support work to improve the ecological value of native woodlands and to enlarge them through the development of forest habitat networks. We have recognised the plight of particular species and, in addition to funding the creation of new and improved habitats for capercaillie, we contributed £770,000—a not inconsiderable amount of money—to a programme of work to remove redundant fences that might kill capercaillie, which fly into them. We have also launched a black grouse recovery project in Argyll and are mapping priority areas for red squirrel management in order to secure their numbers against the predatory grey squirrel. Funding for native woodland initiatives also comes from lottery funds and private and voluntary sources. For example, BP is providing £1 million per year over a 10-year period to support native woodland projects in Scotland.

I believe that we have achieved a good deal since the launch of the strategy. We are also putting in place important foundations for future development. Closer working with others and within the Executive will improve the integration of our rural land-use and environmental policies. In the meantime, the work of the Scottish forest industry cluster group will help to develop and strengthen our forest products industry. The new administrative arrangements for forestry will ensure that we take full advantage of Scotland's significant forestry resource, which is 70 per cent of the UK total.

In order to give members a better feel for Scottish forestry and its tremendous potential, I have arranged for copies of a new publication, "Scotland's Trees, Woods and Forests", to be made available in the chamber. I hope that everyone has a copy, as the booklet includes a well-written preface by me. It has a lot of pictures, which will suit Opposition members. *[Laughter.]* I encourage members to read it.

We are determined to work towards our vision that Scotland will be renowned as a land of fine trees, woods and forests. They strengthen the economy, make a positive contribution to our markets and enrich the natural environment that people enjoy and value so much.

I move,

That the Parliament notes the report of the Interdepartmental Review Group on Forestry; welcomes the proposed changes to the administrative arrangements for forestry in Scotland contained in that report; notes the proposals by an industry wide steering group for a new Scottish Forestry Grants Scheme, and believes these changes will help achieve the objectives set out in the Scottish Forestry Strategy.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I am not sure whether the minister made clear in his speech whether he is a red or a grey squirrel.

10:39

**Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP):** I am pleased that we have the opportunity to debate the importance of the forestry industry to Scotland. I was most interested in the minister's sharing of his extensive knowledge of the flight patterns of capercaillie. I am pleased that I did not quite catch his remarks about the mother of the house. It is lucky for him that she is not in the chamber. We will read with interest those remarks, whatever they were, in the *Official Report*.

The forestry industry is extremely important to Scotland, and it is important to underscore why that is the case. The industry provides 11,000 jobs directly and 44,000 indirectly. In the previous debate that we had on forestry, which took place in Aberdeen on 30 May, the minister estimated the value of the industry at £800 million. Along with fishing and farming, forestry is one of the three Fs of rural industries.

However, it is fair to say that the industry feels that forestry interests are not being taken seriously enough by the Government, here and in London. The Rural Development Committee, in its extensive visits around Scotland, heard at first hand about the grave problems facing the industry. As some of those issues relate to reserved matters, they are outwith our control. We have not mentioned them in the text of our amendment, because we do not want to detract attention from our positive proposals. However, such issues include the strength of the pound; the climate change levy; and—perhaps most significant of all—the massive and cheaper production of wood elsewhere, particularly in the Baltic states, the import of which is displacing indigenous timber and forest products. Those problems are very serious and, although we always welcome a note of humour—even flippancy from time to time—members should forgive me if my remarks are also very serious.

It is unfortunate that forestry was not the first choice of debate for today. We were supposed to debate foot-and-mouth, but of course the Executive was not in a position to proceed with its report. That underscores the fact that the Executive does not seem to take the forestry industry's interests as seriously as we believe it should do.

**Allan Wilson:** Will the member give way?

**Fergus Ewing:** I will in a second.

Moreover, although I welcome some of the minister's comments in his opening speech, those comments are not reflected in the text of the motion. In fact, they have nothing to do with the motion, which refers primarily to administrative arrangements. There is much to be commended in

the forestry strategy. However, the text of the motion invites us not to debate the real problems, but to discuss the administrative arrangements in the Forestry Commission. Those arrangements are not unimportant, particularly for the people who work in the Forestry Commission, but the industry expects us to address the real issues that it faces.

I am happy to take an intervention from the minister if he still wants to make one.

**Allan Wilson:** I just want to respond to the fairly cheap political point that this debate was only an afterthought. Does the member accept that I have had a proposal for a debate on forestry before the Parliamentary Bureau for a matter of months and that I have been waiting for parliamentary time so that the debate could take place? As a result, the Parliament's misfortune that we are unable to debate foot-and-mouth disease today is in fact the forestry industry's good fortune.

**Fergus Ewing:** I am sorry that the Parliamentary Bureau has not given more priority to the minister's pleas. However, the substantive point is that the text of the Executive's motion does not invite us to consider issues of importance.

In the next 10 to 15 years, the volume of wood that is produced and harvested will increase by two thirds, which will create a number of problems and opportunities for the industry. It is essential that a market exists for such a huge increase in the volume of wood, and the Scottish National Party believes that we can pursue at least four partial solutions.

First, we must improve the appalling state of our roads. Secondly, we must create more effective methods of allowing biomass to be used as a means of generating electricity and heat. Thirdly, Government and Government agencies must have an effective procurement policy; what we have at the moment is a complete mishmash. Finally, we must promote the use of wood as an environmentally friendly building material. I acknowledge that the minister touched on some of those issues—and that the forestry strategy document addresses most of them—but the question is when the strategy will be converted into action. That lies at the root of the industry's concerns.

Although there is huge scope for wood to be used as a biofuel for the generation of electricity and/or heat, the Government does not seem to realise that wood-burning plants do not have to be huge undertakings. That appears to be the Department of Trade and Industry's policy. Relatively small-scale plants that burn wood to heat buildings could be used in schools, hospitals and public buildings. Perhaps John Home

Robertson can tell us whether any thought has been given to the possibility of such heating being used for the new Scottish Parliament building.

**Mr John Home Robertson (East Lothian) (Lab):** Does the member want us to spend even more money on another boiler system?

**Fergus Ewing:** Perhaps we will hear from Mr Home Robertson later on the subject.

The Government could do much more to encourage such developments through grants. However, the DTI does not go along with that sort of thinking.

**George Lyon (Argyll and Bute) (LD):** Is Mr Ewing aware that, in Lochgilphead in Argyll and Bute, Torren Energy Ltd has developed a community wood-heating scheme, which is being installed in 50 houses that are being built by Fine Homes Ltd? The reason for choosing such a system is that Communities Scotland is encouraging the use of sustainable heating systems. As a result, policies are in place to encourage the further development of such systems throughout Scotland, and I hope that the rest of the country will follow that example.

**Fergus Ewing:** I am certainly aware of Torren Energy's work, and very much welcome the development that George Lyon has mentioned. However, why have such developments not happened all over Scotland? What is happening in Lochgilphead is certainly more of an exception than the rule.

Why have biofuels not taken off? The simple answer is that the Government's non-fossil fuel obligation arrangements did not allow operators to use existing technology, which meant that new and unproven technology had to be used instead. As a result, although one plant was built—at Arbre Energy Ltd of Selby in Yorkshire—it failed to complete commissioning satisfactorily and subsequently went into receivership. Millions of pounds have been wasted. Government policy is certainly muddled on this issue. Although there are grants for the planting of short-rotation coppices such as willow and of other fuel crops such as miscanthus, the policy is frankly a complete waste of time and money.

On rural roads, it is unfortunate that the minister has not managed to fulfil the promise that he gave on 30 May to arrange a meeting involving the Executive, the rural affairs committee of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and representatives of the forestry industry. That meeting was supposed to take place on 12 November, but it has now been rearranged for 8 January. If the minister cannot even fulfil a promise to meet the industry, does he really expect the industry to feel that he is taking it as seriously as we believe it should be taken?

Furthermore, according to Highland Council, it will take 200 years to repair the existing minor road network in that area. It has been estimated that it will cost £80 million simply to maintain the current situation. I have no doubt that other members will talk about the state of roads in their areas. With the wall of wood that is due to arrive, the impact on the road network will be far greater than at present. Although some modest progress has been made, we all acknowledge that the problem is extremely serious.

As far as timber procurement is concerned, the industry feels that certification is in a complete muddle. The principal standard applied to forest management was developed by the Forest Stewardship Council, which is an unelected and unaccountable body based in Mexico. Although an alternative certification standard that has been developed by the Pan European Forest Certification Council has already achieved far greater volumes of certified timber than the FSC standard, attempts by the industry and others to get the FSC to recognise the PEFC standard have so far failed. The DTI and the Scottish Executive have completely failed to sort out this extremely serious problem, which is purely one of bureaucracy.

We want wood to be promoted in construction. Although I welcome to some extent what the minister has said on the issue, I want his comments to be converted into action. Building regulations might require to be altered as a result.

Urgent action is required to address concerns about rural roads, to stimulate the development of biofuels and to promote the increased use of certified wood and wood products. The Government and Government departments have a vital role to play. The strategy and the words are in place; it is time now for delivery and action.

I move amendment S1M-3541.2, to leave out from "welcomes" to end and insert:

"but believes that the Scottish Executive has failed to acknowledge the significant contribution to the Scottish economy of the timber and forest products industry and, in particular, in respect of the existing devolved functions of the Executive, further believes that it has failed to recognise the importance of the urgent need to improve the road network used for forestry extraction, of an effective policy of procurement to encourage the Scottish national industry interest, of effective promotion of biomass to assist in the achievement of more economic means of supplying energy from renewable sources and of the encouragement and active promotion of the use of wood as a building material."

10:49

**Alex Fergusson (South of Scotland) (Con):** In opening this debate for the Scottish Conservatives, I want to state that I am disappointed that we are not debating the Executive's response to the foot-and-mouth report,

as we should have been. I hope that, when the time comes for that debate, we will be given the full three hours that was scheduled for this morning. However, I expect to be disappointed in that regard.

The one and only good thing to emerge from the decision to postpone that debate is that we have at last been given the opportunity to debate the subject of forestry in the chamber in Executive time. If it had not been for my members' business debate in Aberdeen, the industry, which employs 11,000 people, has an enormous effect on the local economy of several rural areas of Scotland, as well as on the national economy, and was described by no less a person than Sir Michael Strang Steel, the head of Alba Trees, as the third largest in Scotland—that is what my amendment refers to—would have gone virtually unmentioned until now. It would probably not have had an airing had it not been for the postponement of the debate on the foot-and-mouth response.

I welcome this opportunity, because a great deal needs to be said. The debate is not helped by the incredibly laid back, self-satisfied and complacent tone of the Executive's motion. In essence, the motion states that everything is fine and that we should leave the industry to it. The Executive is saying that adding the word "Scottish" to a grant scheme or two and splitting the administrative structure of Forest Enterprise will achieve all the objectives that it set out in the two-year-old forest strategy. The strategy was launched by John Home Robertson, who I am pleased to see is here, published by Rhona Brankin, who clearly decided to leave before the subject came up, and studiously ignored by Allan Wilson.

Forestry is not an industry in which all is well. It is on its knees and has been for some time. The industry is up against massive competition from imported timber from the Baltic states, not only because of currency differentials but because of cost differentials. It is an industry that has been created since the last war with a significant input of taxpayers' money and is now having its transport links cut off in some cases because of a lack of a little bit more. It has had to make huge changes, rightly, to address the environmental and social benefit issues, to which the minister referred, and some of those issues still prevail. However, the addressing of those issues has added tremendous cost increases to an industry that is ill-prepared to meet them.

Forestry, however, is an industry that can be environmentally friendly. It is highly sustainable and has a massive role to play in rural development. That should be right up the street of this Scottish Government, but what is the Government's response? It asks us to agree that Parliament

"notes the report of the Interdepartmental Review Group on Forestry; welcomes the proposed changes to the administrative arrangements for forestry in Scotland contained in that report; notes the proposals by an industry wide steering group for a new Scottish Forestry Grants Scheme, and believes these changes will help achieve the objectives set out in the Scottish Forestry Strategy."

We are being asked to believe that those changes will help the forestry industry to fulfil the aims of the forestry strategy. I do not believe that, neither does the rest of my party and nor, I believe, does the Scottish National Party. We believe that, whatever the merits of the changes—it would be churlish to suggest that there are none—they will do virtually nothing to further either the aims of the forestry strategy or the needs of the industry.

I repeat that the industry is firmly on its knees and in need of assistance. Some of that assistance should take the form of firm targets. If the long-term wood supply forecasts are to be meaningfully addressed, why does the Scottish Executive not insist that the Forestry Commission remove the 40-hectare limit on unimproved land that can be planted under current grant schemes? I understand that SEERAD might be willing to increase that limit to 200 hectares, but that the commission is sitting on the fence and, in effect, preventing what would be an invaluable measure in addressing the forecast deficit of some 2.5 million metric tonnes by 2045 even if new plantings were to be doubled during the next 20 years, and a deficit of 4.5 million metric tonnes if there is no new planting.

There is an industry-wide perception that the new Scottish forestry grant schemes farmland premium will foster new plantings only where there is deemed to be a social benefit requirement. There is a perception too that the criteria for successful applications under that scheme will fall under the same parameter as areas that have received challenge funding. Some of the minister's speech probably backed up that perception. Those are not necessarily the areas that will best benefit or enhance the industry. However, if that perception is strong, there is total conviction in the industry that the application process for the new schemes, which were meant to simplify the process, is considerably more complex and bureaucratic. That, in turn, will make the schemes more expensive to administer and processing the applications will simply require more Forestry Commission staff time. That is typical of what we get from the Executive: more bureaucracy, officials and cost, and less money going to where it should be targeted.

The new Scottish schemes, and the devolving of power under the new structure, are fine in as far as they go. I will not be overly critical of them, but unless they are backed up by the political will to

drive the industry forward, they are as nothing. A recent example was brought to my attention in East Ayrshire, where an application to plant 145 hectares has been submitted. Not one of the statutory consultees raised objections, and there are few transport issues and only a couple of minor local objections, which are outwith the statutory consultation process. However, the decision on whether an environmental assessment is required is still not forthcoming after nine months of fruitless negotiation. How can any industry move forward properly under those circumstances? Where is the decisiveness and firm grip of management that any industry requires?

The forestry strategy is a fine document, but without the robust political will and realistic support that I am calling for, it is a complete waste of time and effort.

That leaves the big issue of transport, on which I know that many other members will contribute. In response to my members' debate in Aberdeen on 30 May, the minister kindly agreed to my request, as Fergus Ewing mentioned, to get round the table with COSLA's rural affairs committee and industry representatives to discuss the specific problem. The minister knows what the problem is—he has been to a meeting of the timber transport forum and was present at the launch of Dumfries and Galloway's agreed timber transport route plan at the highly successful international forest fest 2002 at Lockerbie. He is probably not aware that many of the industry representatives who had to sign up to that agreement felt that they did so with a local authority gun that was loaded, cocked and well and truly held at their foreheads.

Many in the industry were grateful that the minister agreed to my request to set up the meeting, and I wrote to the minister on 17 June to ask who the industry representatives at the meeting would be. Showing his normal haste in response to the industry's interest, the minister wrote a reply on 31 October. I received it on 4 November, which was—amazingly—timed to coincide with the announcement of today's debate. I hope that I am not often thought of as a natural-born cynic, but if there are many more coincidences such as that, I will become one.

Furthermore, when I learned that the meeting that was agreed to in Aberdeen on 30 May is now scheduled to take place on 8 January, some seven months later, I realised why there is a sense of despair in the Scottish forestry industry. That lack of urgency signals a complete lack of interest, which is what the industry considers that it is getting from this Administration. The industry has a significant role in rural development and employment, but it is being held back—

**Allan Wilson:** Will the member give way?

**Alex Fergusson:** I am in my final minute and winding up. The minister will be replying to the debate.

**Allan Wilson:** It concerns the meeting.

**Alex Fergusson:** If the Presiding Officer is happy, I will give way.

**Allan Wilson:** The delay in the meeting with COSLA has been raised twice now. Does the member accept that the delay in convening the meeting has been at the behest of COSLA rather than the request of the Scottish Executive?

**Alex Fergusson:** If the minister tells me that, I will of course accept his word. Nonetheless, I think that the meeting could have been driven with more urgency than has obviously been the case. A request can always be denied, and I would have liked to think that the Executive would show more urgency.

As I was saying, the industry has a significant role in rural development and employment and is being held back by a Scottish Government that is either unwilling or unable to support it in the way that it so desperately requires. It is met with tea and sympathy on the one hand, and inaction, as exemplified by the motion, on the other. The industry deserves a great deal better, and it would not take much resource to allow it to fulfil the potential that it undoubtedly holds. What is clear is that, under this Administration, it will not receive it.

I move amendment S1M-3541.1, to leave out from "and believes" to end and insert:

"but condemns the Scottish Executive's failure to address the practical problems which face the Scottish forestry industry, particularly with regard to transport; further notes that the Executive has failed to set and promote robust planting targets or to plan for the impending doubling of timber output over the next 10 to 15 years, and urges the Executive to give greater priority to the issues which so concern what is now the third biggest industry in Scotland."

10:58

**George Lyon (Argyll and Bute) (LD):** I echo the sentiments that have been expressed by other members about their being given the opportunity this morning to debate the forestry industry.

Forestry is a very important industry to Scotland, as the previous speakers outlined. Some 1.2 million hectares are currently planted with trees in Scotland, which accounts for about 15 per cent of our total land area. That acreage has trebled since 1924. Half of Britain's forest and woodland area is located in Scotland, and 20 per cent of Scotland's forests are located in Argyll and Bute, making timber one of the most important industries in my constituency. It is a major employer, and it is very important to the well-being of many communities throughout Argyll and Bute.

Forestry wood processing, as has been said, contributes more than £800 million to the Scottish economy, although there seems to be some dispute about the number of jobs involved. The minister suggested 10,000, then we had bids of 11,000 from Fergus Ewing and Alex Fergusson. We certainly agree that a good number of jobs are involved, particularly in rural Scotland. The greatest impact is there, and although we can argue whether the industry is Scotland's third most important, clearly it has a major role to play in the prosperity of many of our rural areas.

As members have said, timber production is set to double by 2015 to 800 million tonnes a year. That is a massive increase, which will bring substantial challenges to industry and to the Government. The challenge to Government concerns transport. There is an urgent need for continued investment in our transport infrastructure to cope with the coming increase in wood production over the next few years. The industry faces great challenges to promote more use of timber, to improve its competitiveness by developing a strong forest industries network, to increase processing capacity to keep up with the increase in production that is coming on stream, and to develop products that the market needs and wants so that import substitution can take place.

There are huge market opportunities to be seized by Scotland's forestry industry to reduce its reliance on imports. Currently, the United Kingdom imports 80 per cent of its wood and wood products. That can and must change. The figure could be cut to 60 per cent by 2020, and Scottish timber could close the gap.

One of the major barriers to achieving that goal is the strength of sterling, which was touched on by two previous speakers. Our major competitors are the Scandinavian and Baltic countries. If we compare the value of the Swedish krona with the pound in the mid-1990s, we note that the krona's value has fallen by 50 per cent since 1994-95. That makes Swedish timber extremely competitive in the UK marketplace.

**Brian Fitzpatrick (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab):** Does the member recognise that the biggest market for forestry products remains the rest of the UK and that we do not want anything to upset those arrangements?

**George Lyon:** Yes. The point that I am about to make is that, because of the strength of sterling, other countries' extra competitiveness is reflected in the UK market price for timber, which has fallen from somewhere above £20 per tonne in the mid-1990s to about £10 per tonne today. That is a huge fall in anyone's language. That means tighter margins for the industry and less money to invest in the future, and, in some cases, it makes the

extraction of timber—certainly from some of the island areas—an uneconomic prospect. In other words, the timber can never be harvested because there is not enough return. That makes Scotland less attractive for inward investment, which links in with the need to invest in further processing capacity.

It is against that harsh economic background that the industry needs to invest even more in its future. It needs to invest in further processing capacity and more value-added production to cope with the coming increase in timber volume. It is a difficult circle to square, but that must be achieved because, without that vital investment, Scotland cannot grow its share of the UK market.

I hope that the minister can reassure us that he is doing everything possible to secure the investment that I will refer to next. It is vital that the proposed second pulp line at Caledonian Paper plc in Irvine gets the go-ahead from its parent company. Decisions are yet to be taken about where that investment will go. As far as I understand it, there is competition between the Irvine company and another plant that is located on the French-German border. The second processing line would increase throughput from the 250,000 tonnes per year that are currently processed at Irvine to 850,000 tonnes, which would be a huge jump in capacity. The public agencies are doing a lot of work to try to ensure that the investment comes to Scotland, but I ask the minister in his summing up to give an assurance that no stone will remain unturned to ensure that we secure that investment for the future of the Scottish forestry industry.

In my last few minutes, I turn to some of the transport issues that have been highlighted. Among the key issues that arise in my constituency is the shifting of timber transport from road to sea. That is working well with the use of the freight facilities grants and a substantial tonnage of wood has switched from road to sea. This morning, industry representatives told me that 110,000 tonnes in Argyllshire alone have been switched from road to sea. Timber is now loaded at Portavadie, Campbeltown and Ardrishaig and shipped directly to Caledonian Paper plc at Irvine. That has dramatically reduced the number of wood lorries on our major roads and reduced the number of miles that are travelled by 1.3 million. The freight facilities grant has already made a substantial impact in my constituency.

One would think that those changes would reduce the wear and tear on our roads and ease pressure on the local authority roads budget. One would be wrong. The transfer from road to sea has reduced timber traffic on the A83, which is a trunk road owned by the Scottish Executive. However, the local authority minor roads are used to

transport timber from the forests to the ports. We face the problem of using single-track roads—originally dirt-track roads that were covered with tarmac in the 1960s using the crofting counties grant scheme—with no proper construction and no firm base underpinning them. Those roads must cope with 42-tonne wagons travelling up and down, day and night, transporting wood to the ports. Many of the single-track roads in my constituency are in a dreadful state; the surfaces are poor and grass verges are run over as drivers attempt to pass each other in tight conditions.

There is a desperate need for more investment to upgrade and improve those roads, because they will be needed in the future. We are replanting in many areas already and, in another 20 or 25 years, the traffic will return. The traffic will not disappear and yet no funding has been allocated from the local authority grant-aided expenditure scheme to ensure extra investment to upgrade the roads. All that we have from those grant schemes is the historical investment for repairs.

Will the minister give serious thought to setting up a special fund that councils can bid for to upgrade their single-track roads if they have had a huge increase in timber transport and use of the roads? Such a scheme would be of great benefit.

In my constituency, the rail scheme to transfer timber from the roads has not worked well and more work must be done.

Timber production is set to double over the next few years and that means more jobs and more opportunities for rural Scotland. We must grasp those opportunities. Scotland must invest in more processing capacity to deal with extra production and we need more value-added products. The Executive must continue to invest in our road transport infrastructure to ensure that the transport system can cope with the extra tonnage. Finally, we have a great opportunity for Scottish timber; I hope that the Government and the industry will work together and take hold of that opportunity to deliver for rural areas.

I support the motion.

11:09

**Mr John Home Robertson (East Lothian) (Lab):** I declare an interest: I am a partner in a family farming business and some trees grow on our land. Perhaps I should also make an apology. I have to attend a meeting between members of the European Committee and colleagues from Flanders and Catalonia, so I must leave the debate before the end. I apologise for any discourtesy to members in the chamber.

I whole-heartedly welcome the debate about an industry that is growing in every sense of the word.

The industry makes a substantial contribution to the rural economy and to the landscape of Scotland. It is an excellent use of land and takes huge quantities of carbon dioxide pollution out of the global atmosphere. Well-managed woods and forests are major assets for the economy and ecology of Scotland. Other members have mentioned high-quality ancillary industries, such as Alba Trees—Alex Fergusson referred to it—which is located at Gladsmuir in my constituency of East Lothian. There are many more examples.

There should be considerable potential for value adding by the Scottish timber industries. Much is already going on and there is potential for more. I am delighted that a lot of Scottish oak and Scottish sycamore is being used for high-quality furniture and finishings as well as for the structure of the Holyrood building. Holyrood should be a showcase for Scottish timber and Scottish skills, which I hope will be noted nationally and internationally.

As minister with responsibility for forestry, I was an enthusiast for forestry when we were writing the new Scottish forestry strategy and I am still an enthusiast. Increasing the area of woods and forests to 25 per cent of Scotland's land area by 2050 is an excellent and achievable objective and I sincerely hope that a lot of Scots pine and native hardwood species will be included.

A lot has been achieved and I pay tribute to the good work that the Forestry Commission has done over many years. The Forestry Commission certainly did a good job of managing forestry policy and Forest Enterprise before the devolution settlement, but I am not convinced that we need to retain that United Kingdom quango structure for ever. The minister has, as he said, started the process of reform, which I welcome. However, we may need to go further and I suggest that fresh legislation may be needed sooner rather than later.

The Scottish Executive environment and rural affairs department is at the heart of our Government and is fully accountable to the Parliament and to our Rural Development Committee. That is as it should be. The time may have come for forestry policy to come in from the cold and into the heart of our rural policies. The minister said that, but I think that we may need to go rather further than he suggests.

Scotland has the lion's share of Britain's forestry, as a number of members have explained. I do not believe that it makes sense to leave administration and policy development for that important sector to a detached group of civil servants under a nominated board of commissioners. I must be careful what I say. Lord David Clark, the chairman of the Forestry Commission, is an old friend and I hope that he will not mind me making that point—perhaps I

should discuss it with him later—but the debate must be had.

The Forestry Commission has done an excellent job during a difficult period of history. It replanted huge areas after the decimation of forestry during the first world war. A lot has been done, but the commission may have become an anomaly in post-devolution Britain. At present, the Forestry Commission is not part of our rural affairs department. It is nominally a free-standing United Kingdom Government department, which happens to have its headquarters in Edinburgh. It is led by a board of commissioners, who are collectively accountable to the three UK forestry ministers, with Chinese walls between the Scottish, English and Welsh territorial sectors in the Forestry Commission headquarters.

My most vivid memory is of the chief executive of the Forestry Commission presenting forestry ministers with the fait accompli of a big deficit in the Forest Enterprise account and leaving it to us to persuade our respective finance ministers to pick up the tab. We have inherited an odd chain of responsibility and it is right that we should have a radical review—I was going to say “a root-and-branch review”, but my colleagues have persuaded me not to—of the way in which we govern that important sector in the context of the devolution settlement.

We should certainly develop United Kingdom co-operation on research and in other shared interests. That is valuable and must continue. However, I strongly believe that Scottish forestry policy should be one of the core responsibilities of our environment and rural affairs department. I am convinced that direct accountability would be better for the management of land use and environmental policy, now that the Parliament is firmly established.

Forestry and timber have a big future in Scotland. I urge the minister to bring forestry policy in from the cold and to bring the excellent people who worked up the Scottish forestry strategy into the heart of Scotland's environment and rural affairs department. The days of the pseudo-quango should have passed and we need to move on.

11:14

**Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP):** I lived for many years in a highly afforested area in Galloway and watched the landscape darkening under Sitka spruce. However, I found that there was little benefit for the local community and much by way of disbenefit. There was no processing and little direct local employment, but the local people suffered the disturbance and destruction of their environment. That experience

is entirely reflected in the Scottish Borders, which has, in the Kielder forest, the largest afforested area in the UK.

I am glad to see Ian Jenkins in the chamber—late and one hour into the debate, but at least we now have a Liberal Democrat MSP from the Borders present. No doubt he was busy doing something else; I bear no grudges.

Although the Scottish Borders contains the largest forest in the UK, there is no processing of timber in the area. However, there is all the inconvenience. I refer the minister to my contribution—and that of my colleague in the Scottish Borders Ian Jenkins—to the members' business debate in Aberdeen during the summer. We referred to the environmental damage to Borders villages and hamlets caused by heavily laden lorries rumbling through narrow streets. The issue of road improvements really will not matter there, because such narrow village roads cannot be repaired without being destroyed again by those lorries in any event.

The solution, although I will not dwell on it again—I hope that Mr Wilson is ready for this—is the development of the southern half of the Borders railway line, with a spur link to Kielder forest at the Riccarton junction. I was present during the statement this morning, when Margaret Curran said that she had an interesting diary. I suggest that Allan Wilson visit Riccarton junction to liven up his diary. He can travel to it on the track where the original railway line lay. The track is still there and it would be easy-peasy to put a railway line on it so that we can move the forestry trees directly on to trains. That appears to be the minister's policy and he could easily implement it.

**George Lyon:** Will Christine Grahame take an intervention?

**Christine Grahame:** I will not take an intervention from George Lyon, although Ian Jenkins may interrupt me if he likes.

When Allan Wilson visits Kielder, perhaps he could bring the Minister for Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning. If that is what he calls cross-cutting and partnership, I would like to see it in action. They could consider locating a processing plant there. It is an insult to people to surround them by trees without providing them with any of the manufacturing. A local processing plant would also, in part, remove the problems of environmental damage.

The second part of the SNP amendment deals with encouraging the use of indigenous wood materials locally. I learn from Scottish Enterprise Borders that wood fuels used for on-site heating can often compete with fossil fuels, particularly in rural areas where wood is available nearby. I am advised that equipment for converting wood into



heat is relatively cheap and simple. Control systems rarely need to be sophisticated, hot water tanks provide temporary energy storage and it is easy to incorporate a standby heat source, such as coal, oil, gas or electricity—although piped gas is often not available to remote areas—for use when the wood fuel system is out of action for maintenance purposes.

I ask the minister to investigate—he might already have done so—what has been done to encourage small-scale heating schemes. I heard about the example that has been mentioned, but I would like to know where else small-scale heating schemes could be viable, not just for schools and local hospitals, but for prisons, country hotels, farms, industrial estates and cold stores. There is a whole range of uses for such heating schemes, on which Scotland unfortunately falls down in comparison with its Scandinavian neighbours.

I refer the minister to Borders Biofuels, which has identified housing estates in the north of England and in Scotland that are close enough to sources of forestry residues to be supplied with district heating from centrally placed boiler houses. The company is offering home owners free central heating system installation in return for a contractual agreement to buy heat from a central boiler for a set period. According to the company, the cost of heat will be lower than if the home owner bought and used fossil fuel. I ask the minister to look into that.

John Home Robertson mentioned the new Scottish Parliament buildings. The timber school in the Borders uses mature fallen trees—

**Mr Home Robertson:** It is called Woodschool.

**Christine Grahame:** Yes. It uses those trees to make high-quality, custom-built furnishings. I hope that the procurement group will consider the materials that Woodschool uses. There are lots of good things going on.

Finally, I want to mention social inclusion. A team based at Glentress is working to help long-term unemployed people to improve their quality of life by using the availability of the forest. I wish such projects to be pursued.

Like my colleagues, I am concerned that the Executive has lodged an administrative motion rather than a substantive one. I ask the minister to reflect on the fact that, during the debate, I have not felt that either he or some of his back benchers—particularly those from urban areas—were taking the matter seriously.

11:19

**David Mundell (South of Scotland) (Con):** When the minister launched his glossy 40-page booklet that contains pictures of trees, I wondered

at whom it was aimed. However, the minister's preface helpfully advises me that it

"is written for anyone and everyone".

I am sure that people will benefit from it.

I start on a positive note by reflecting on the international forest fest 2002, which took place in Lockerbie at the end of September. It was a tremendous event, not just for Dumfries and Galloway, but for Scotland. For the first time, a major international forestry exhibition and various international competitions on forestry activities were brought together. It was a great success for the area and it showed that forestry is a modern industry. People think that forestry consists of a guy going out in the proverbial checked shirt with a chainsaw. That perception is a real problem, as it does not represent forestry. Forestry is a high-tech, modern industry. Pieces of equipment on display at Lockerbie were worth millions of pounds. There was high-tech equipment not just for taking things out of forests, but for producing products. We must turn round forestry's image of being an industry of the past. If we can present forestry properly, it will be an industry of the future.

Attracting young people into the industry is important. I saw welcome developments in Dumfries and Galloway, at Howies in Dalbeattie and at the Stephen's Croft site between Lockerbie and Moffat, but it is disappointing that young people are still reluctant to work in the industry. We need to encourage them to do so and we must equip them with skills to add value.

Let us be honest: there has been considerable resentment in Dumfries and Galloway and other areas about the industry. Trees have been grown, but transportation issues have caused pain and it has been felt that no value has been brought to the economy. There have been welcome developments in the forestry cluster in turning the situation round and getting value into the economy, but we must get youngsters with skills into the industry to take advantage of that. That is a serious challenge.

I was present when the minister announced the agreed forestry routes plan for Dumfries and Galloway at the international forest fest 2002. Not for the first time, Dumfries and Galloway Council did not follow my advice. I would not have let the minister leave the site without committing money for forest roads. I would have locked him in the presentation tent until he had agreed that more money would be made available for roads.

The plan is welcome and sensible, but it is only part of the solution. An area such as Dumfries and Galloway, which is one of the most afforested parts of Scotland, cannot generate sufficient resources from its council tax base to tackle the enormous roads problems. I am startled to find

myself almost agreeing with George Lyon. There must be national funding to the local authorities that are most affected by the problem.

**Allan Wilson:** I accept that there is a need for increased investment in the rural road network to support the procurement of timber. As the member knows, we will invest £70 million over the next three years in the process and a further £20 million for assistance. How much more would the Tories invest?

**David Mundell:** We would quantify the problem in cash terms and work with the local authorities that are affected to allocate resources. The minister should consider a community such as Eskdalemuir, which has 235 residents on the electoral roll. There are hundreds of thousands of trees in that area and the council cannot be expected to invest £15 million or £20 million in local road networks. There must be a mechanism for national support funding for roads into such communities.

**Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD):** Despite what the member says, does he accept that the Conservative Government scrapped the crofting counties roads scheme? Does he regret that move?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid):** David Mundell has one minute left.

**David Mundell:** As I have only one minute, I cannot speak about the previous or the future Conservative Government. The roads issue cannot simply be brushed aside and it cannot and should not be party politicised. With the doubling of timber production in the next few years, the issue is serious and must be resolved. I do not for one minute suggest that there is an easy fix, but resources must be made available, otherwise the current balance between communities and the forestry industry will come to a head and we will be unable to progress. There are road safety issues and the sheer destruction of the roads must be considered. Such issues must be grappled with if there is to be a truly vibrant forestry industry in Scotland.

11:26

**Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** I welcome the opportunity to debate forestry. The nature of forestry is such that action that we take today will have long-term effects that will sometimes last for many generations. Therefore, we need to get our policies right for the future. If we agree a long-term vision for forestry, outcomes will be delivered many years hence. Species such as Sitka spruce provide a fast economic return, but we need to get the balance right in respect of native woodland. If such woodland is properly managed, it can create returns, albeit that those will not be in the short term.

There are many side-benefits of forestry—for example, visitor attractions and forest walks—and forest management must have regard to those benefits. It is important that such activities are encouraged and that everyone is allowed to benefit from forestry, not only economically, but socially. Knowledge of the environment can be increased and recreation and exercise provided. One problem that I have come across in that respect is the lack of joined-up government. That does not necessarily create barriers for large forestry organisations that have the resources to build relationships with all the agencies, but it can for small owners or community forests.

Forestry planting and management are supported through rural development grants, while local enterprise companies' responsibilities cover the creation of facilities for visitors, walkers, cyclists and educational trips. I am not criticising how the different agencies work to fulfil their obligations, but I am criticising the lack of a one-stop shop, which, if people are not used to working with many agencies, can be off-putting and can create barriers. Our policy must cover all aspects of forestry and make assistance and advice more accessible to smaller developers.

I want to discuss community ownership of forestry. Everyone is aware of the benefits that were brought about by community ownership at Abriachan and I am sure that we would want that model to be copied. I have been in touch with the North Sutherland Community Forest Trust. It is keen to see local ownership of forests such as Borgie forest, but Forest Enterprise does not seem to be encouraging that aspiration. Forest Enterprise is working towards a management agreement with the community, but that falls short of the goal of community ownership, which would allow the community to plan for the future and create jobs. One obstacle appears to be that the forest has a mature crop that is ready to harvest, but that obstacle could be overcome if Forest Enterprise handed over the forest to the community in stages following harvesting.

There are many ways in which communities can benefit from the ownership of forests. As has been said, they can look for uses for waste products and for new and innovative uses of native species. Communities are more likely to take an holistic approach to managing forests and creating jobs. Large timber operators tend to be interested in harvesting timber, but they tend not to be as concerned with side-benefits, such as tourism or community business.

One side-benefit of forestry is the use of waste products for energy creation—that subject has been discussed this morning. I was interested in the fact that a project is being considered in Kinlochleven that will provide heating and hot

water for 600 homes. The price of that scheme should equate to about half of what it costs to heat an average home in Scotland. The scheme would bring huge benefits to the community. We know that in rural areas there is not the same choice in energy. Most people are forced to use electricity for heating, which can often be expensive. We must encourage such projects. George Lyon mentioned the project in Argyll, which was supported by Communities Scotland.

We need to find more uses for native woodlands. A lot of work is being done to investigate how we can use low-grade timber. I pay tribute to Highland Birchwoods, which has examined the feasibility of using that type of timber for flooring and windows, for example. We must learn lessons from the past about how we manage native woodlands. If they were managed properly, the timber would be of higher quality and would obviously have better uses.

I know that many members have talked about transportation, but I want to add that we must consider transportation at the planning stage for forestry, not when the forest is ready to harvest and we find it necessary to have a knee-jerk reaction. In planning forestry and allowing forests to be created, we must feed into the local plan our views on how the forest will be harvested and how the timber will be accessed.

**Alasdair Morgan:** The problem is that that would have been fine 30 years ago, but the forests are now where they are and the likelihood is that most replanting will be on the same sites for obvious reasons of economics and ownership. Changing the planning process now will not give us a big advantage.

**Rhoda Grant:** That is not necessarily true. Given that we are trying to extend forestry cover in Scotland, an awful lot of new forests will be planted. I am not saying that the road that will take the timber out should be built before the forest is planted, but that consideration should be fed into the local plan—it has to be accepted as an issue that is up and coming. If we leave it to the last moment, we will have timber rotting on the ground with no way of extracting it. It is important that we address the matter.

I urge the minister to meet members of the North Sutherland Community Forest Trust to see whether we can take forward their aspirations. I would be pleased if he also took on board my comments on other issues.

11:32

**Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP):** Having compiled a member's bill on forestry, I was particularly interested in the forestry devolution review. I would go so far as to say that I was quite

excited by its final recommendations, because they were somewhat similar to my own thinking. That excitement was dulled by the watered-down stance that the Scottish ministers have taken.

I went a bit further than the review group's recommendations, in that, like Rhoda Grant, I wanted local communities to have a real say in what happens with the forests in their neighbourhood. However, our policies were similar. The policy of ensuring that decisions are taken at a level as close to the people as possible is known as subsidiarity.

I remember that Jack McConnell looked quite surprised when Kenny MacAskill told him that as First Minister he owned Inverness airport. The Scottish ministers also own Scotland's forests. The ownership of the forests was transferred under the Transfer of Property etc (Scottish Ministers) Order 1999 (SI 1999/1104). Article 4 of the order transferred

"all rights and interests belonging to a Minister of the Crown in any land in Scotland"

acquired under sections 39 and 40 of the Forestry Act 1967 and any property used for the functions of the Forestry Commission in Scotland, with the exception of the Forestry Commission headquarters in Corstorphine Road and the research offices.

Given that the Scottish ministers own the forests in Scotland, I found it surprising, to say the least, that they do not want to take real control over what are some of Scotland's most precious national assets. It is surprising that the Scottish ministers do not want to bring the management of Scotland's forests more transparently within the control of Scotland's people. I cannot see how the minister can justify leaving such a valuable Scottish asset in limbo. The position can easily be altered. Westminster legislation is not required. We already own Scotland's forests, so let us bring their operation back home. I ask members to support the SNP position and set up a forestry management structure in Scotland for Scotland. For the sake of the Scottish timber industry, let us be brave.

As I said, the ministers own the forests, but they hold them in trust for everyone who lives in Scotland. They should work towards making them forests for us all. I want a restoration of the public aspects of Scotland's forests. That is starting to happen in some ways with the central Scotland forest in my area and the Millennium Forest for Scotland Trust, for example.

I have read the booklet that the minister recommended—"Scotland's Trees, Woods and Forests"—and its foreword. The document represents a way forward and it is good that we are putting out that kind of publication. There must

be a proactive reconnection of the people in the country with the assets of the country, such as forestry. We must be aware of how forestry issues and policy affect us all. For example, is the presence of vast conifer monocultures really the way forward for Scottish forestry? Should we not have more regard to the need for biodiversity? Should we think of our forests only as a cash crop? Why can we not turn the forests for which we have paid so handsomely through our taxes into a vast national resource for education, leisure, employment and other social and economic ends? I say that we can.

**Allan Wilson:** I am confused about what Linda Fabiani is proposing. I understood that her draft bill intended to divide the functions of the Forestry Commission among local authorities, but that there was little appetite for that among local authorities or industry. She is now talking about a "vast national resource". How are the two ideas compatible?

**Linda Fabiani:** The minister is wrong. The proposal that he mentioned was one of the options that was outlined in my consultation, but the general thrust of the bill was to bring forests under some form of local control.

Education about our forests is important. I commend an initiative that has been started in Dalkeith, in Rhona Brankin's constituency—the world of trees initiative. I declare an interest, as I am a trustee of the charity that is promoting it. The initiative aims to make the forest an educational resource for young people, so that they can see the benefits that forestry brings to us all. A generation of children is growing up who cannot tell one tree from another. Adults are generally the same—I am certainly no expert.

The wildlife in the forests represents another huge learning resource, but it, too, is in danger. The minister mentioned capercaillie. There is a problem with declining stocks of capercaillie in the wild. We must look again at how we are managing that decline.

For the future of Scotland, for her people and for her environment, we must promote a new linkage between the people and the land. I hope that we can seize the opportunity now and move that forward.

11:38

**John Farquhar Munro (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD):** We have heard about the history of the Forestry Commission and how much of an influence it is on everybody in the countryside. The Forestry Commission has, for more than 80 years, been a major influence on the Scottish economy, particularly on the rural economy where the Forestry Commission and its

subsidiaries have provided jobs, homes and business opportunities that have helped to retain and sustain families and communities in many of the deprived and sparsely populated areas of our countryside.

The concept of the Forestry Commission was first launched in Scotland in 1919. It was established as a massive job creation exercise—and an excellent one it was. That followed the end of the great war and was an early attempt to promote the stated promise of a land fit for heroes.

From that simple beginning, the initiative has developed a vibrant economy. As we have heard, it has supported about 7,000 direct jobs in forestry and a further 3,500 jobs in timber processing, which together contribute about £800 million per annum to the Scottish economy. That is quite a success story and extremely good value for the annual subsidy of £33 million that the Forestry Commission currently receives for its activities in Scotland from the Scottish consolidated fund.

The Forestry Commission, as everyone will know, is responsible for the protection, expansion and promotion of Scotland's forests and woodlands. It has, in its wisdom, established a subsidiary company named Forest Enterprise, which is the commercial arm of the Forestry Commission and is responsible for the entire forest estate.

Apart from the main function of timber production and harvesting, Forest Enterprise has progressively developed its forests in harmony with the surrounding environment. It has created habitats for the protection of wildlife and is continuously extending its tourist and visitor facilities, providing woodland walks, cycle tracks, car parks, pony paths, picnic areas and so on, which all make a valuable contribution to our rural economy.

As Forest Enterprise continues to develop and expand, it is obvious that it will require additional financial support to achieve its targets and objectives. Much of its harvestable timber cannot be extracted over our deteriorating rural roads. Many of the plantations are inaccessible by road and Forest Enterprise has been forced to load timber on to barges and small coasters for direct delivery to the mill or railhead. While that is undoubtedly environmentally friendly, it involves expensive specialist equipment and expertise, which we should support through something like a dedicated marine freight facilities grant. In north-west Skye, in my constituency, Forest Enterprise has extracted by sea 17,000 tonnes of timber. That is quite an achievement in such a remote area.

I hope that the forest industry will come to have an even more important role in our rural economy.

For instance, last month, signatories of the Kyoto protocol met in India to discuss international rules on carbon trading. The debate proposed an option to allow forest plantations, or carbon sinks, to be included in the carbon-trading scheme as a much-needed boost to the effort to find a solution to the problem of global warming. The protocol requires developed countries and companies to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions to 5 per cent below 1990 levels by 2008. A company that is unable to meet its targets can buy credits from a less polluting company or invest in less polluting operations. CO<sub>2</sub> absorption by forest plantations, however, is not yet included, which is a great pity. The Scottish Executive must work with Forest Enterprise to encourage the British Government to promote the inclusion of forestry in the Kyoto protocol. Forestry could be a productive and innovative way of meeting international commitments on global warming as well as of regenerating rural communities.

We have heard this morning that forestry in Scotland has been an undoubted success. We are indebted to Forest Enterprise for its diligence and foresight and we must continue to support its efforts in order that the next 80 years can deliver the same degree of excellence. I am pleased to support Allan Wilson's motion.

11:44

**Trish Godman (West Renfrewshire) (Lab):** I want to speak about the parts of the strategy that concern the contribution that forestry makes to the environment, the creation of opportunities to help people to enjoy the trees, woods and forests and the ways in which we can help communities to benefit from that strategy.

We should all play a part in the campaign to preserve what is left of our native woodland and to recreate woods grown from our native trees such as rowan, birch and oak. With careful management, funding and the involvement of local communities, a great deal can be achieved. I was pleased to hear the minister remind us this morning of the £4 million announced in the spending review for forest recreation facilities, giving groups that are committed to improving our cultural heritage the opportunity to progress innovative ideas. Indeed, it was a project by the Scottish Woodland Trust that enabled me to give my grandson in Australia a present of 100 trees planted in the north of Scotland for him and his school. When Christine Grahame was talking about the Kielder forest, I remembered that it was on a walk through that forest that my husband proposed to me. I accepted and have lived happily ever after, so I could say that there is romance in them thar woods.

Local communities and schools should be encouraged to participate in the development of

native woodland schemes, with the right kind of management and adequate funding.

I would like to make a plea for support for the planting of trees in our urban areas. Apart from the regrettable absence of shops and community centres in housing schemes that were built in the 1950s and 1960s, little thought was given to decent landscaping. The development of woodland in and around our towns and cities should be part of the new system of woodland management. Trees enhance any built-up area and might mask some of the awful 1950s and 1960s architecture. There is something dispiriting and cold about a treeless shopping, business or housing development. We should argue for tree-planting schemes in our countryside and in our towns and cities.

I welcome the minister's statement. There should be public participation in the management schemes. We must ensure that voluntary organisations that are doing a good job in relation to the replanting of our native woodlands, such as the Scottish Woodland Trust, are given the support that they need. However, we must remember that the right balance must be found between the complementary pressures on land use to ensure that the needs of agriculture, biodiversity, transport and forestry fit appropriately with access for leisure and tourism.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We are now down to speeches of four minutes. I call Robin Harper.

11:47

**Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green):** I am happy to declare my interests as a member of the Scottish Woodland Trust, Borders Forest Trust, and the Carrifran Wildwood trust. I am also an avid planter of trees: before being elected, I personally organised the planting of 1,000 trees in Craigmillar as part of an inner-city project and I have distributed, free of charge, many oaks from my back-garden Scottish oak nursery to friends and relations all over Scotland and England.

This debate has been excellent in that it has raised many issues around forestry of which the Executive must take tent. However, one issue has been missed out. Of the members of the Transport and the Environment Committee, we have with us in the chamber no Conservative, Labour, SNP or Liberal Democrat member—no members of the Transport and the Environment Committee are present apart from me.

**Rhona Brankin:** Will the member give way?

**Robin Harper:** No, because I am making an important point. The absence of those members highlights the assumption that forestry is a rural

development matter rather than an environmental one. Similarly, from the minister's speech we find that an issue that the Transport and the Environment Committee has been dealing with for four or five months has been left out: the water framework directive.

Page 24 of the document "Scotland's Trees, Woods and Forests"—which, although it is not produced by the Executive, is typical of an Executive document in that it is 70 per cent pictures and 30 per cent content—draws our attention to the contribution that forestry can make to the terms of the water framework directive. The minister will also be aware of the policy suggestions that have been developed by the WWF in its wild waters directive.

John Home Robertson said that forestry should be a core responsibility of the Scottish Executive environment and rural affairs department and I absolutely agree. However, is forestry integrated? The flavour of the debate so far suggests that one extremely important aspect of the huge opportunities for forestry to get engaged in development in terms of the water framework directive, particularly in relation to water quality and flood management—which is not to say that the water framework directive says that forestry must do that—has been missed. There was no sign in the minister's speech that the Executive is considering that as a core future development. Perhaps it is considering it and work is going on in the background. My criticism is that that is not being highlighted and was not highlighted in the minister's opening speech.

There is no doubt that this is the time to factor forestry development into the water framework directive; it must not be left until later. The same point can be made about agriculture: there is no sign that agriculture has been factored in. I throw a challenge into the Executive's lap. What will the Executive do on such integration? There is no sign of it at the moment.

11:51

**Mrs Margaret Ewing (Moray) (SNP):** In gentle chastisement of Robin Harper, for whom I have a high regard, I say that one does not need to serve on a committee to study or be interested in an issue that is debated in the chamber.

**Robin Harper:** I was not criticising the members present.

**Mrs Ewing:** I am sorry, but I am not going to get into a debate with Robin Harper. It is important to place on the record that all of us can be interested in subjects without necessarily being on a subject committee and that we should not chastise people who are probably working hard elsewhere.

In the short time that I have, I am pleased to participate in the debate, particularly as, for well-known reasons, I missed Alex Fergusson's members' business debate in Aberdeen on the timber industry. I read that debate with great interest, despite the painkillers that I was on at the time, and found many of the comments extremely helpful. Some of those comments have been reiterated in this debate.

My colleague Alasdair Morgan will close on behalf of the SNP. The Gallovidians have the most afforested constituency in Scotland, and the Moravians have the second most afforested constituency. Alasdair Morgan and I have therefore shared over many years opportunities to discuss forestry. We often had to fight in the House of Commons for the issue to be raised. Occasionally, we would get a question in to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. Any debates that were held were usually late at night and also of short duration. However, the Scottish Office always replied to those debates, because it was considered the lead office on that subject in acknowledgement of the significance of the forestry industry to Scotland. I can make no comment about the Scotland Office, because I am not sure that it leads on anything these days. I will not develop that discussion, because I am sure that the Presiding Officer would rule me out of order.

I will pick up on a few points. I intervened on the minister's opening statement with a point on the processing of timber, which is vital. We seem to be giving ministers rather crowded diaries this morning—Margaret Curran and Allan Wilson will be extremely busy. Nevertheless, I suggest that the minister comes to Moray and visits James Jones and Sons in Mosstodloch, where we have an up-to-date, highly skilled sawmill and processing plant. Not a piece of the timber is wasted: the bark goes to garden centres, and we have all seen people such as Alan Titchmarsh and the Beechgrove gardeners use it. Allan Wilson could then visit Buckie harbour, where he would probably see more timber waiting to be exported to be pulped in the nordic states than he would see fish, which is an aspect that worries us in that area. Much more could be done to encourage processing in Scotland.

Little has been said about addressing the price of timber. It has fallen substantially—by approximately 25 per cent—in the past several years. Although I realise that the Executive has given some additional money to forestry and the timber industry this year, that money does not make a dent in that substantial price fall, which obviously has an impact on the industry's potential.

The minister spoke about the health, educational and recreational purposes of forestry. On his visit to Moray, he could visit Culbin forest, which is one of the most wonderful, most blissful places to visit. It surrounds the beautiful Findhorn bay. We have been talking about capercaillie, but we recently had a Pulp concert at Silver Hill, near Duffus, about forestry. That concert attracted more than 3,000 young people and had a huge impact on the local economy. We have mountain bike fields near Fochabers, which young people run voluntarily and which have almost 50 members.

All those things are happening. We need a clear strategy to ensure that the industry progresses. We are all proud of it and we consider it an asset to Scotland, but for goodness' sake, let us get the strategy right and not leave the industry isolated with vague promises.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call Alasdair Morrison and then Brian Fitzpatrick.

11:56

**Mr Alasdair Morrison (Western Isles) (Lab):** In the few minutes that I have, I will dwell on the merits of the crofters forestry scheme. The minister will recall that, during his successful visit to my constituency during the summer, we discussed that scheme's merits. Since its inception, it has been a force for good, not only in the Western Isles, but throughout the Highlands and Islands.

I am sure that the minister will also recall that my Hebridean colleague, Calum MacDonald MP, was the one who successfully piloted the Crofter Forestry (Scotland) Act 1991 through the House of Commons. Since that act received royal assent, thousands of acres of trees have been planted in the crofting counties.

The importance of the crofter forestry scheme cannot be overstated. Whether the crofters carry out the work themselves or use forestry agents, it involves a great deal of community participation. The scheme has proved to be an excellent early example of community-based forestry. The benefits for crofters are varied. They include the availability of shelter for livestock around the croft and on the hill, the creation of wildlife habitats and small-scale timber production. Importantly, the scheme also allows crofters to diversify their agricultural activities and provides an alternative source of income.

Wherever there has been a scheme, it has guaranteed crofters and grazings committees a source of income. They first of all receive an establishment grant and then, for some 15 years thereafter, are in receipt of management payments.

In the context of Executive budgets, the sums of money are not spectacular. However, the crofter forestry money is literally transforming—and has transformed—the landscape. It is also transforming the fortunes of many villages and villagers in my constituency and throughout the Highlands and Islands.

Since the mid-1990s, grazings committees have received money for the first time since their inception. That money has been spent wisely and communally on schemes that benefit crofters and other village residents.

That is the history over the short period of some 10 or 12 years. The future of the scheme concerns me. I have some delicacies about the changes that are proposed to the woodland grant scheme. I agree with the change of emphasis to the regeneration of existing woodlands and away from tree planting.

However, the minister will recall from his visit to the Western Isles that many of the landscapes there are uninterrupted by trees. We, of course, point the finger directly at Tavish Scott's Scandinavian relatives, who, uninvited, visited the Hebrides over 1,000 years ago. I am sure that the minister appreciates that we cannot talk about regenerating existing woodlands in the Hebrides. We must talk about regeneration there in the sense of replanting and replacing what used to exist. I urge the Executive to take account of that obvious fact and ensure that the crofter forestry scheme continues in the Western Isles.

I endorse what Rhoda Grant said about Borgie forest. I urge the Executive to move on Borgie forest and ensure that the community is allowed to secure ownership and management of that forest. We have already seen the benefits of that throughout the Highlands and Islands, whether on Eigg, in Assynt or through the Stornoway Trust. North Harris—DV—will follow suit. The aspirations of the North Sutherland Community Forest Trust dovetail with our land reform proposals. I urge the Executive to move quickly on that.

I would wish to be associated with few issues that Alasdair Morgan raises, but I fully support his point about job dispersal, which he made in an intervention. Calum MacDonald MP and I have supported moves by Highland colleagues to have Scottish Natural Heritage's headquarters moved from Edinburgh to Inverness. I would urge the minister to move the Forestry Commission jobs nearer to the trees, as Alasdair Morgan put it, and to the communities attached. I would urge the minister to move those jobs from Corstorphine to Carloway.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I am sorry, but my screen has been playing up. For Brian Fitzpatrick, whom I had said was going to be next to speak, read Alex Johnstone.

12:00

**Alex Johnstone (North-East Scotland) (Con):** I hope that that confusion will not be made often, Presiding Officer.

I have a couple of topics to explore. First, I will do the traditional regional thing and point out that forestry is an important part of the rural economy in the north-east of Scotland. It provides direct employment in tree nurseries and in timber management and production. It is also important indirectly, through associated businesses such as tourism, for example. It is estimated that about 1,330 people are employed in the forestry industry in Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire. Although production in the area is currently below 400,000 tonnes a year, that figure, as is the case in the rest of Scotland, is forecast to double over the next 10 years.

There is real potential for creating jobs in the industry, but one or two things must be addressed—and are being addressed extensively—by Aberdeenshire Council and Aberdeen City Council, which have been working together on a review of the joint indicative forestry strategy. It is hoped that the final version of the strategy will be submitted to the Scottish Executive this month. The Executive has possibly received it already.

Throughout the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, timber planting has resulted in Aberdeenshire's having about 92,000 hectares of woodland, which represents about 14 per cent of the total land area. The forest resource varies from about 18 per cent of the land in Donside and Deeside to less than 7 per cent in Buchan. The two councils' indicative forestry strategy identified Banff and Buchan as being the preferred area for new planting, which has helped to secure Forestry Commission support for the planting of well-designed, productive forests.

The key issue that the forestry industry must address for the north-east, as for the rest of the country, is that of transport. It is extremely important that roads are maintained. In particular, we need links for moving around Aberdeen, and I make no apologies for mentioning Aberdeen's need for a western peripheral bypass.

There has already been an enormous effort in transporting timber by rail—although perhaps not by sea. Timber has started to be delivered to a railhead at Inverurie recently, which has taken a great deal of timber off the main road south, via Aberdeen. The problem is that taking timber away by rail takes it out of the area for processing elsewhere. We want the timber to be processed in the area. If that means moving timber from the area to the north of Aberdeen, where there is considerable production, to the south of Aberdeen,

where there is processing capacity, then it needs to get past the city of Aberdeen. At the moment, the road network is simply not up to that. If the Deputy Minister for Environment and Rural Development could have a word in the ear of the Minister for Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning, I would be most obliged.

Secondly, the environmental impact and contribution of forestry has been the subject of debate. At this point, I give my full backing to the minister for his support for the red squirrel. It is a bit like the issue of seagulls, which some people do not take very seriously. The demise of the red squirrel is something that none of us would like, and the environment that forests create in the north and north-east is the last bastion in the defence of that species.

While on the subject of the environment, I would like to apologise for the non-presence of John Scott, our environment spokesman and Transport and the Environment Committee member, at the debate. He was scheduled to take part, and would have done so gladly had he not had to withdraw at the last minute.

**Robin Harper:** Will Alex Johnstone accept that my earlier remarks were in no way meant as a chastisement of my colleagues on the Transport and the Environment Committee? I presume that colleagues would have been here if they had been asked to be here. My comments were on the party approach to what is a rural affairs issue.

**Alex Johnstone:** Indeed, I fully accept that. I will, however, make one final remark on the environmental aspects of forestry. There are many sirens among this audience that are trying to bring the minister round to the idea that forestry is almost exclusively an environmental issue. For areas such as the north-east and the south-west, forestry is very much a commercial issue. While the Conservatives accept that the environmental aspects are important, the commercial aspects are also extremely important in many regions. I support the minister's environmental principles. I am, however, disappointed by the absence of other aspects of forestry in the motion, so I gladly support the Conservative amendment, which highlights the issues of real priority to the forestry industry in Scotland.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We now come to winding-up speeches. Members should keep to their allotted times, and make their speeches a little shorter if possible. Jamie Stone, for the Liberal Democrats, has four minutes.

12:05

**Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD):** This has been a wide-ranging debate, and I congratulate Alex Johnstone on



going to both ends of the spectrum: from red squirrels to the Aberdeen western peripheral bypass, amazingly enough. That is the nature of the debate, however.

In response to an intervention during his opening speech, Allan Wilson touched on job dispersal, which is hugely important. He spoke about community initiatives, to which I will return when I mention Linda Fabiani's speech. We have also heard about redundant fences, red squirrels and the importance of forestry to the Scottish economy. Whether the correct figure for the industry is 11,000 or 10,000 direct jobs is neither here nor there; we know that an awful lot of jobs are involved and we know how important they are.

Fergus Ewing highlighted roads, to which I shall return at the end of my speech. He also touched on the parts of the SNP amendment that deal with biomass. I was particularly interested in his thoughtful comments on encouraging increased use of wood in the building industry. Having spoken informally to him after he made his speech and having learned that he was referring to timber framing, I endorse his remarks entirely. We can go further; it would—whether we are talking about building regulations or the tweaking of planning regimes—behave the Parliament to make positive moves in that regard.

I congratulate the new willowy figure of Alex Fergusson who has done extremely well; he has lost a great deal of weight recently. He clearly feels passionately about the forestry industry, which he described as an industry that is "firmly on its knees"; however, none of us can take anything away from the sincerity of his remarks. I am sorry about any problems that he has had with delayed postal services.

George Lyon was right to highlight the importance of the rail network and the movement of timber by sea. He talked about investment in the future and thinking ahead. He talked about getting imports down from their present level, which is far too high; that is a laudable aim.

David Mundell was absolutely correct to address the image of the forestry industry. I do not think that many of us think that people working in it still wear lumberjack shirts, but the industry has to be made a more sexy and convincing career choice. Indeed, it can be a very suitable career.

Linda Fabiani and Rhoda Grant both spoke about community involvement. I whole-heartedly endorse Linda's remarks on the county of Sutherland. She also talked about the involvement of the young, as did David Mundell. The school outings and walks that are being developed in forested areas are good, but we could go a lot further.

John Farquhar Munro gave us a comprehensive overview of the history of the Forestry Commission, and discussed what could be done in relation to the Kyoto protocol, and Margaret Ewing rightly highlighted timber processing. We heard about the sawmill at Mosstodloch and about the export of timber through Buckie. She is absolutely right to say that sawmills have been closing—at least throughout my lifetime—and that trend could and should be reversed.

Alasdair Morrison, to my surprise, mentioned the Vikings. We will leave that to one side for the moment, however, while I endorse the remarks that were made about roads. I am grateful that the minister acknowledged concerns on the subject in response to an intervention. We require a fund that local authorities can bid into because, as the minister is aware from my correspondence, there is in my constituency a huge problem with the roads—one from which we cannot walk away.

12:09

**Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** Although I am sure that the Forestry Commission will see advantages in the strategy review, the one thing that stands out is the call for value for money. With that in mind, we must hope that the grant schemes will concentrate on key priorities.

The emphasis appears to have shifted from growing and harvesting timber to the development by Forest Enterprise of partnership projects such as the Dalriada project in Argyll. Forest Enterprise has linked with British Waterways and voluntary community groups in promoting environmentally friendly schemes for the public good. Those schemes are good and I am all for the public good. On the public good, I note that one of the documents mentions tackling deer problems and that the minister spoke about the value of wildlife. I hope that Forest Enterprise will consider red deer and roe deer as an asset rather than a menace and will immediately stop its scandalous policy of incessant year-round slaughter of those species, which are a priceless part of Scotland's natural heritage. If those species are managed properly, they can be incorporated into forestry policy.

The main issue is that more attention should be given to making the forestry industry a more robust player in the Scottish economy. Now that there are three separate countryside agencies in Great Britain, it is essential that they operate with minimum bureaucracy and that duplication of services is avoided. For example, a single unit provides machinery and vehicles for Forest Enterprise throughout Great Britain, which works efficiently. The system must stay efficient. If we want a good forestry industry, we must tackle the practical problems that hinder it.

I will make five points, the first of which is on transport. I ask the minister to consider specifically the Argyll timber transport group's bid—which has twice been refused—for a grant to produce more haul routes on roads of the group's making, which would remove pressure from public roads. The Executive should promote payment of more freight facilities grants by building new piers and maintaining old ones in areas where timber can be transported by sea. I am thinking of places such as Loch Striven, Craighouse on Jura and Bunessan pier on Mull. The transport of timber by sea saves huge Government expenditure on the damage that timber lorries do to roads.

Secondly, as the Scottish Executive cannot see the wood for the trees, we had better thin the trees. The point of the forestry grant scheme must be to produce quality saw-log timber from the existing forestry crop and to improve forests' commercial quality. We need good productive forestry plantations. The Executive should look to Belgium and Austria, which offer generous grants—supported by the European Union—for non-commercial thinning, which is essential to the production of quality timber.

Thirdly—and very important—there is not a level playing field in relation to grant allocations to Forest Enterprise and to the private sector because new planting is not taken into consideration. Although private companies have created 10,000 hectares of new planting, Forest Enterprise has planted only 100 hectares. That is a sad reflection of the fact that state-run enterprises continually receive Government support at the private sector's expense.

Fourthly, Scotland should use forestry for biofuel. The scheme at Whitegates in Lochgilphead is the first district scheme of that type in Scotland. Under the scheme, 48 homes are heated by wood chips from local forestry. There is a central boiler and the users are metered individually. In Malmö in Sweden, the homes of 100,000 people—half the population of the city—are heated in the same way. I point out to Robin Harper that such schemes do not involve fossil fuel, but carbon-neutral fuel that is endlessly renewable, which is what he likes. I wonder why he did not mention that scheme because it is a key point and is based on the principle of biodiversity.

The practice is similar to that carried out centuries ago on the hillsides around Loch Lomond, where timber was coppiced on a 20-year cycle to make charcoal. The new system combines an age-old product with modern technology to create a non-polluting benefit. If enterprises such as the Whitegates scheme were given the benefit of the non-fossil fuel premium, which goes to other renewable sources such as hydro and wind power, there would be a rush to create a new industry in Scotland.

Finally, the Executive should support any initiative to bring a new pulp mill to Scotland and to create a biofuel plant alongside it. Scotland has an enormous paper-making industry. It is ridiculous that the Arjo Wiggins Carbonless Papers Ltd site in Fort William makes high-quality paper with 100 per cent imported pulp in an area that is surrounded by forestry, but there is no doubt that the company would prefer to use local pulpwood.

In Scotland, the timber and customers exist, but the methods must be changed. Scotland needs three forest products: quality saw-logs, biofuel timber and pulpwood. That is how to make the forestry industry profitable.

12:14

**Alasdair Morgan (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP):** I represent what is either the most forested constituency in the country or the second most forested one. There is a question as to whether Galloway and Upper Nithsdale or Argyll and Bute has that particular honour. Either way, there are a lot of trees nearby.

I re-emphasise my earlier point about the dispersal of Forestry Commission jobs. In the past few years, there has been a loss of jobs in rural areas through the closure of Forestry Commission area offices. So, far from jobs being dispersed, we have a smaller proportion of them than we had some years ago.

**Allan Wilson:** I am a supporter of jobs dispersal, but we must appreciate the fact that the Forestry Commission is a cross-border public authority that has a Scottish headquarters and that there is a danger that dispersal in a GB context would mean a net loss of jobs from Scotland.

**Alasdair Morgan:** Indeed. However, the forestry devolution review, which we are meant to be discussing today, recommends dispersal of jobs from the commission's headquarters to the various national offices. Given the fact that the Executive has accepted that, I presume that that will happen in any event.

During the minister's wide tour d'horizon—which covered everything from the review to the grey squirrel population to roads and tourism—he said very little about the devolution review, although it is meant to be the main subject of the debate. The review is a fairly dry document, however, so perhaps that is just as well.

We have had a wide-ranging debate in which many subjects have been raised. It was rather inventive of Alex Johnstone to introduce the Aberdeen peripheral route, but I suppose that everything is fair game. Fergus Ewing raised some good points about roads—to which I shall return—and biomass. We are interested in the example of

the use of biofuel in Lochgilphead, although that demonstrates how slow we are in getting to where we want to be. I would like the minister to comment on the way in which the provisions north and south of the border seem to militate against developments in biofuel. Fergus Ewing also mentioned certification problems in relation to promotion policy, and the promotion of the use of timber in building.

Several people—notably Alex Fergusson—raised the issue of bureaucracy, particularly as it surrounds applications for future development. The conclusion that we are coming to is that, although the words are fine, there seems to be a lack of urgency to implement the policy. The strategy is fine, but is it being pushed forward? If it takes eight months from request to fruition to arrange a meeting, sufficient urgency is not being given to what is being done.

I echo members' comments on the importance of the forestry industry to rural areas. Nevertheless, its importance is not always immediately obvious and there is a problem of perception. Christine Creech—

**Christine Grahame:** Do not call me that.

**Alasdair Morgan:** I apologise—old habits die hard. Christine Grahame mentioned some of the disadvantages of forestry to people in rural areas. There are problems with water quality and fishing, which I was going to mention before Robin Harper spoke. Many of the rivers in Galloway are blighted by acid problems that are caused partly by insensitive tree planting. There are also the problems of road traffic and the look of many of the forests. The problems are made worse by the fact that many of the forests are owned by private owners who live hundreds of miles away from them.

There is an additional problem in that the employment benefits to contractors and drivers are not necessarily experienced by the people who live next door to the forests and who may object to future forestry developments. It is important to get communities on our side in talking about the development of forestry. I regularly receive mail on two main issues with regard to forestry. The majority of complaints are about timber traffic passing through villages and causing danger and damage. Where large timber lorries pass through villages at fairly high speeds, often in convoy, that causes considerable alarm.

Alex Fergusson and others also raised the issue of certain areas of forest becoming landlocked because councils have introduced weight limit orders to preserve what remains of the fabric of roads. That problem must be resolved, otherwise we will throw away the value of forestry, not just to the firms that carry out forestry—including the

Forestry Commission, which is the biggest of those firms and which we own—but to the nation. We will throw away the value of our investment in forestry if we cannot harvest it.

Despite my intervention, I agree with Rhoda Grant that a priority in new forestry developments must be to look to the future and consider how the trees will be taken out when they reach maturity. However, our main problem over the next 10 to 20 years will be existing forests, many of which were planted without consideration of how they would be removed.

The minister referred to the use of rail, but there are currently few railways in rural Scotland. In addition, rail transport is only economic over long distances and there is the problem of antiquated infrastructure; many places have old railways and sidings. The principal rail company—English, Welsh & Scottish Railway, or EWS—appears to have lost interest in the forest product sector. Unless substantial train loads can be provided regularly over long hauls, rail is not a significant option.

I echo what John Home Robertson said about the Forestry Commission probably being an anomaly in a devolved Scotland and that direct accountability would be better. The review group's report makes that clear. Therefore, I am disappointed that the Government is not considering legislative action to change the situation and is continuing on the anomalous course of simply tinkering with administration.

The Government's major contribution to forestry and forest products has been to produce glossy documents that use the products of the forestry industry. The Government must do better.

12:21

**Allan Wilson:** I thank members for an interesting debate. I think that there is broad agreement among members about Scotland's general direction of travel in relation to forestry. That agreement was emphasised by Alasdair Morgan's speech. However, there are inevitably different views about precisely how we should get there and the weight that we give to different priorities.

I chide Christine Grahame slightly by saying that it is not true that my colleagues and I do not take the forestry industry seriously. I am not sure whether forestry is sexy, as Jamie Stone suggested it should be, but forests can be fun. *[Laughter.]* I am serious. The glossy document—"Scotland's Trees, Woods and Forests"—to which Alasdair Morgan referred and to the publication of which I plead guilty, states that Scotland's forests have 361 forest walks, 110 picnic sites, 94 cycle trails, 55 horse-riding routes, 14 orienteering routes and so on.

The £4 million investment, which I believe has been welcomed throughout the chamber, will promote the leisure and recreational uses of forests. That will advance Scotland's economy and create jobs in the leisure and recreational industries and should be welcomed by all. In my job, I devote a great deal of my time, energy and commitment to promoting the importance of Scottish forestry in the Scottish economy. I will continue to do so and if the list of visits that arise from the debate on the matter is anything to go by, I will certainly be busy in the coming period.

I think that we all acknowledge that important challenges face Scottish forestry. First, there is the problem that is posed by the low price of timber, to which many members referred. We cannot ignore that, but as members will know, I cannot interfere with international exchange markets. However, we must recognise that forestry is, as Alasdair Morgan said, a long-term business and that, in a real sense, the resources that we commit to forestry now will benefit future generations. Therefore, I want to draw attention to policies on new plant and growth.

We are also keen for forestry to be more closely integrated with other land uses in Scotland. An essential feature of the new administrative arrangements for forestry is that the national office for Scotland will be more closely involved in policy development in related areas of Executive business. Members referred to obvious examples of that and I referred earlier to integrating the activities of the Forestry Commission more closely with the enterprise objectives of promoting jobs in the tourism, leisure and recreation industries.

John Home Robertson talked about effectively abolishing the Forestry Commission. That was an option in the devolution review, but I did not favour it. The proposed changes will bring forestry policy in from the cold, as John Home Robertson wants, through a strengthened national office for Scotland.

Apart from certain aspects of international representation, forestry is fully devolved, but it makes good sense to take advantage of the economies of scale that can come from operating across the larger market of Britain. That is never clearer than in relation to research. Someone—Christine Grahame, I think—suggested wrongly that we could do that without primary legislation. Even if such a move were desirable, legislation would be required both in this Parliament and in Westminster.

When I challenged David Mundell to say how much more the Tories would invest in roads than we are currently investing, the result was silence. That is understandable, because the Tories failed signally to invest in roads during their tenure in office. I take the point that in order to gain value

from the product we must ensure that it can get to the market. I also accept that in order to achieve that, we must invest in the roads infrastructure in rural areas. However, I believe firmly that the way to achieve that is to give additional resources to local authorities, so that the local authorities can then engage with the industry in their locality. Through the timber transport groups and through the timber transport forum, progress can be made in devising strategies and plans for getting the product from the forest to the market.

The use of wood fuel in new housing developments was mentioned by Fergus Ewing and others, including Christine Grahame and Rhoda Grant, and I agree firmly with them that the matter is important. George Lyon provided the Parliament with an example of that from his constituency. I can tell members that the Executive is involved in preparing a scheme to encourage the supply of wood fuel from forests to end-users. We are funding a large partnership project to quantify the size and location of the wood fuel that can be obtained from traditional forests and from mill co-product as well as from biomass in towns and transport corridors.

**Robin Harper:** Will the Executive issue advice to local authorities? I know from my meeting with Torren Energy Ltd that, despite receiving help from one place, it had difficulty in getting local authorities to appreciate its ideas.

**Allan Wilson:** I will certainly consider that, because it sounds to me like a good idea. I know that the local authorities in my constituency have been involved in discussions that have taken place involving the forest industries cluster, Clydeport and Forestry Enterprise about a new wood fuel power plant, but it might be appropriate to issue more general advice.

Having given Robin Harper that assurance, I will perhaps also chide him somewhat because I made extensive reference in my opening speech to the importance of forests to our natural environment. The Forestry Commission will of course work with the Scottish Environment Protection Agency on the new water framework directive. Indeed, if Robin Harper is not already aware of it, he should know that new guidelines on forests and water that reflect the directive are now out for consultation. It is for members to feed into that consultative process.

**Fergus Ewing:** On the use of wood for power generation, there has been much talk about the prospect of coal-fired power stations being run on coal and wood. If that became a reality, would the minister accept that such a development would create a substantial market for wood that could be provided from Scotland and from south of the border? Does he accept that that would make a huge contribution to the consumption of the wall of

wood that we will see shortly?

**Allan Wilson:** I accept the general point that the advancement of new biofuel production technologies presents tremendous scope for the use of wood in conjunction with other fuel sources and that that would create great opportunities for the industry.

Before I took that intervention, I was about to say that the new grants scheme to which I referred in my opening speech will offer higher rates for riparian wood, which is wood that is grown alongside rivers and burns.

**Alex Fergusson** *rose—*

**Allan Wilson:** I cannot take any more interventions, but I will try to deal with the points that Alex Fergusson raised. I recognise that the member reflected the industry's desire for relaxation of the 40-hectare limit for the grants schemes—perhaps that was the point on which he wanted to intervene. We need to be cautious until the forward commitments settle down. We have made strenuous efforts to maintain annual payment rates in the face of falling farm incomes and we have agreed annual limits, which we will relax when it is sensible to do so. A question was also raised about the environmental impact in a certain part of Ayrshire, which I am not in a position to comment on, because if the applicant chooses to appeal they will appeal to Scottish ministers. The grant scheme is being developed in partnership with the industry, environmental bodies and local authorities. The Executive has accepted all their recommendations. It is a Scottish scheme, and it will remain so.

Rhona Brankin asked whether the northern research station was safe and I am happy to announce that it is. The quinquennial review has concluded and there is no intention to relocate that station.

George Lyon raised important points about the positive contribution that the processing industry makes, and the proposed second line at the Caledonian Paper plc factory in Irvine, which is close to my constituency. It goes without saying that we are doing all that we can to help the company to make the case for investment in Scotland, rather than in other parts of Europe that might be in the frame for the investment. My colleague Iain Gray has been in constant contact with the company and has travelled overseas to ensure that Scotland's interests are being reflected.

It is unfortunate that Margaret Ewing is not here, because my final point is about added value and timber. I agree with most, if not all, of what she said. Although little of our timber is exported before processing, members throughout the chamber share the aim that we should endeavour

to ensure that as much timber as possible is processed in Scotland so that the value that is added to our timber product is retained in Scotland.

## Business Motion

12:32

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid):** The next item of business is consideration of business motion S1M-3549, in the name of Patricia Ferguson, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Wednesday 13 November 2002

2:30 pm Time for Reflection

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Stage 3 of Debt Arrangement and Attachment (Scotland) Bill

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

7:00 pm Decision Time

Thursday 14 November 2002

9:30 am Scottish National Party Debate on Poverty

*followed by* Scottish National Party Debate on Crime

*followed by* Business Motion

*followed by* Members' Business—debate on the subject of S1M-3522 Johann Lamont: Regulation of Private Security Firms

2:30 pm Question Time

3:10 pm First Minister's Question Time

3:30 pm Executive Debate on National Cultural Strategy

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5:00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business—debate on the subject of S1M-3416 Shona Robison: Licensing Scheme for Fireworks

Wednesday 20 November 2002

2:30 pm Time for Reflection

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Stage 1 Debate on Protection of Children (Scotland) Bill

*followed by* Financial Resolution in respect of the Protection of Children (Scotland) Bill

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5:00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

Thursday 21 November 2002

9:30 am

Stage 1 Debate on Title Conditions (Scotland) Bill

*followed by*

Financial Resolution in respect of Title Conditions (Scotland) Bill

*followed by*

Business Motion

2:30 pm

Question Time

3:10 pm

First Minister's Question Time

3:30 pm

Executive Debate on Scottish Executive Response to Foot and Mouth Disease Inquiries

*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 19 November 2002 on the Discontinuance of Legalised Police Cells (Ayr) Rules 2002 (SSI 2002/472);

(c) that Stage 2 of the Water Environment and Water Services (Scotland) Bill be completed by 11 December 2002 and that Stage 2 of the Public Appointments and Public Bodies etc. (Scotland) Bill be completed by 17 December 2002; and

(d) that the Preliminary Stage of the Robin Rigg Offshore Wind Farm (Navigation and Fishing) (Scotland) Bill be completed by 24 January 2003.—[*Euan Robson.*]

*Motion agreed to.*

12:33

*Meeting suspended until 14:30.*

14:30

*On resuming—*

**The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel):** Before we start, I welcome the honourable Marcel Riera i Bou and Mr Luc Van den Brande, the chairs of the European affairs committees in Catalonia and Flanders respectively. They are here to meet our European Committee. [Applause.]

## Question Time

### SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

#### Social Work and Social Care (Careers)

**1. Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive what steps it is taking to promote social work and social care as career options. (S1O-5848)

**The Minister for Education and Young People (Cathy Jamieson):** The national recruitment and awareness campaign was launched on 22 October. The campaign aims to raise the profile and to highlight the value of social care and social work, and to start to address issues of staff recruitment and retention.

**Des McNulty:** Clydebank College in my constituency has three very successful programmes that provide training for people who wish to work in social care. It has three equally successful programmes for people who wish to work in child care. The proportion of males involved in all those programmes is less than 10 per cent—in an area of very high male unemployment. What is the Executive doing to ensure that there is a better gender balance among those who are trained to work in social care and child care?

**Cathy Jamieson:** I welcome the work that Clydebank College and other colleges are doing to increase the opportunities that are available to all people who want to work in social care and child care. The member may be interested to know that last week, at the Men in Childcare conference, I made it clear that when additional funding was announced—particularly funding related to early-years work—I would write to local authorities and child care partnerships to ensure that we seek to create opportunities for men to work in jobs that might traditionally have been seen as jobs for women.

**Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP):** I refer the minister to the report into the social work breakdown in Scottish Borders that resulted in failure to prevent extensive sexual

abuse of a lady with learning difficulties who is known as Miss X. Is the minister aware that some workers in Scottish Borders Council had 100 cases on their books? One worker was responsible for 120 cases. That has led Scottish Borders Council to advertise to recruit nine social workers. How confident is the minister that, given the current deficit of social workers, those places can be filled urgently?

**Cathy Jamieson:** I thank the member for indicating over the airwaves of the BBC at lunch time that she intended to ask a question along the lines of the one that she has just asked. I am concerned to ensure that, where cases are unallocated, we get people into posts to take them on. We must ensure that we recruit enough social workers and enough people who are interested in social work for the training courses that are available. This year we increased the amount of money that is available for bursaries. Although there has been an overall increase in the number of qualified social workers, that has not kept pace with demand. I take the issue very seriously, and we will continue to address it.

**Mrs Lyndsay McIntosh (Central Scotland) (Con):** Given that, as the minister has just indicated, the demand for social workers far outstrips supply, surely we should not concentrate on recruiting only men. People must be appointed on merit. Anyone with the right talents and skills should be welcome.

**Cathy Jamieson:** The people who enter social work should want to do such work. That is important for building relationships between social workers and particularly vulnerable people. However, most of those who become involved in social work and social care have been women. Unfortunately, in some instances, younger people are not being attracted to fill posts. Our campaign is to recruit people of all ages and backgrounds, and to ensure that we recruit enough people to do the very valuable jobs that need to be done.

**The Presiding Officer:** Question 2 has been withdrawn.

#### School Pupils (Health and Safety)

**3. Mr Gil Paterson (Central Scotland) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Executive what health and safety standards for pupils are applicable in schools. (S1O-5831)

**The Deputy Minister for Education and Young People (Nicol Stephen):** In addition to any other duty that is owed under statute or common law, an education authority must take reasonable care to ensure the safety of pupils under its charge.

**Mr Paterson:** Does the minister agree that it is not acceptable for our children to be educated in

schools or fed in dining rooms where fungus is growing in the roof? If so, what action is he likely to take in North Lanarkshire? Greenhill Primary School in Coatbridge faces exactly the problem that I have described.

**Nicol Stephen:** First, I want to be clear that I do not regard that as acceptable. I do not think that any member in the chamber would find it acceptable. In relation to the school estate throughout Scotland, we recognise that there is a need in some cases to take urgent action. We have significant proposals to improve the school estate. We are about to embark on the most significant investment of more than £1 billion through the schools public-private partnership programme, which was announced earlier this year. North Lanarkshire's share of that will be new capital investment of £150 million for the first time. None of that would be possible with the SNP's position on PPP spending.

**Brian Fitzpatrick (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab):** The minister will be aware of my extensive correspondence with him on the oversight of children on school activity trips and my concerns about the relationship between the Health and Safety Executive, the Adventure Activities Licensing Authority and local authorities. Will the minister tell us what steps will be taken to ensure that Scotland keeps pace with the innovations that are being delivered for adventurous activities in the rest of the country?

**Nicol Stephen:** We will keep in close contact with what is happening in that area in England and Wales. We want to learn lessons from the good work that is taking place there. I am prepared to consider the outcome of the work and, if necessary, take appropriate action in Scotland.

### Central Heating Installation Programme

**4. Alex Fergusson (South of Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Executive what steps it is taking to monitor the progress of Eaga in delivering its remit in relation to the central heating installation programme. (S1O-5820)

**The Deputy Minister for Social Justice (Hugh Henry):** The Scottish Executive currently monitors all aspects of Eaga's performance in delivering the contract for the central heating programme. We monitor how Eaga applies the rules of the scheme, how it maintains quality control and deals with complaints and how it meets the targets set for it. That ensures that the programme continues to provide the best possible service to Scotland's most vulnerable households.

**Alex Fergusson:** I am grateful to the minister for that answer, but I understand that local partnership managers say that the average waiting time for the installation of central heating under the programme is around six months. Does the

minister agree that it is totally unacceptable that an applicant from the Stranraer area, who recently contacted me, has had to wait for central heating since 11 September 2001, when he made his application? Does he agree that many applicants are unable or unwilling to pursue their applications vigorously in the way that the applicant whom I mentioned has had to do and that the Executive's monitoring processes should be reviewed forthwith?

**Hugh Henry:** The member's constituent had to wait during 18 years of a Tory Government that never got anything done. Since this Government came to power, a number of things have happened that are helping the very constituents about whom the member spoke, not least the central heating programme. We should celebrate the success rather than concentrate on some of the inevitable problems that come with a scheme of such significance.

Some 7,000 households are waiting for heating systems and we recognise that one of the results of the success of the scheme is the fact that the demand creates difficulties. We are working hard to tackle those difficulties and to get the programme through as quickly as possible. However, there is a limit to the number of available heating engineers and to the number of heating systems that we can install. I would rather have the problem of having to apologise for the delays, which people clearly find frustrating, than have to say that there is no delay, because there is no system, which is what would have happened if the Tories had got back into power.

**Mr Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab):** Does the minister welcome the fact that Eaga has put in place a parliamentary officer who will be able to deal with complaints on behalf of constituents, rather than having them wait a month or more for a question to be selected here that would not help them?

**Hugh Henry:** Eaga has considered a number of measures to help to improve the system. We should emphasise the fact that it met its target. It installed 3,559 central heating systems in the year 2001-02 and is on target to install 5,000 systems this year. We are happy with its performance. We will consider problems as they arise, but let us celebrate what we have achieved.

**Alasdair Morgan (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP):** Surely this is not a case of one or the other. We are quite happy to celebrate what has been achieved, but the fact is that many people are dissatisfied. The central heating programme is the biggest single item in many members' postbags. On many days, I write more letters to Eaga than I write to the local council. That is saying something, so will Mr Henry keep pursuing the matter with Eaga?



**Hugh Henry:** I must put the issue in its proper context. Like other members, I have received queries from constituents, asking why things are taking so long and whether the process can be speeded up. Equally, as a constituency MSP and as a minister, I have received a huge number of responses in which people have said just how pleased they are to have had their lives transformed since the introduction of the scheme. It is important to maintain a degree of perspective. We will try to tackle the problems that arise but, by God, I would rather have problems than not have such a scheme at all.

### **Air Travel**

**5. Bristow Muldoon (Livingston) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive how it is promoting the responsible growth of air travel in and to Scotland. (S10-5851)

**The Minister for Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning (Iain Gray):** The Scottish Executive has on-going discussions with its agencies—the enterprise networks and VisitScotland—about the promotion of air links serving all parts of Scotland. We are committed to ensuring that the rising demand for air travel brings maximum economic benefits, at minimal environmental cost, to all Scottish airports and the communities that they serve.

**Bristow Muldoon:** I encourage the minister to continue to work with those agencies to enhance the links between Scotland and major European cities. Does the minister accept that improved journey times for intercity rail travel might represent the most sustainable way of improving Scotland's transport links within the United Kingdom?

**Iain Gray:** It is clear that a combination of the two modes of travel is necessary. The greatest symbol of such a combination is our commitment to improve the rail links to Glasgow and Edinburgh airports. New routes are also important, because direct air routes make it less necessary for many passengers to travel from Scotland to London, which offers an environmental advantage.

**Mrs Margaret Smith (Edinburgh West) (LD):** I welcome responsible growth in capacity at Edinburgh airport, but to achieve responsible growth in air travel we must include the option of quality public transport links to reduce congestion. Will the minister tell members when the preferred option for the Edinburgh airport rail link will be announced?

**Iain Gray:** As Margaret Smith is probably aware, we are considering a shortlist of four possible routes for the Glasgow and Edinburgh airport links. We still hope that preferred routes for those links will emerge from that process before the end of the year.

**Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP):** I want to ask what the minister is doing to promote low-cost flights between Scotland and Europe in two specific cases. In the follow-up to the Scotland in Sweden event, what is he doing to establish a direct air link between Stockholm and Scotland? Will he examine the funding structure of Inverness airport, which acted as a barrier to achieving an agreement with Ryanair on establishing low-cost services into Inverness?

**Iain Gray:** The member has asked two questions in one. To some extent, I answered the first question in my initial answer. I am well aware of the interest that has been stimulated in a direct link to Sweden. As Mr Neil probably knows, there is a direct link between Scotland and Sweden, but it does not operate all year round. That is one of the routes that we continue to discuss with the enterprise networks and VisitScotland. Scotland in Sweden was an enormous success and many people felt that, if progress could be made, an air link between Scotland and Sweden would be a good outcome.

There has been much discussion about Inverness airport. The fact is that the £21 million that we give to Highlands and Islands Airports Ltd ensures that there is an Inverness airport. It is HIAL's responsibility to negotiate a commercial deal with Ryanair or with any other operator. Without that £21 million, which is a tripling of the subsidy that we provide to Scotland's airports, neither the low-cost flights that already operate from Inverness nor the more important lifeline services around Scotland would exist at all.

### **Free Concessionary Travel Scheme**

**6. Bill Butler (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive what monitoring mechanism is in place to assess the effective implementation of the free concessionary travel scheme for elderly and disabled people. (S10-5812)

**The Deputy Minister for Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning (Lewis Macdonald):** The Executive works jointly with other partners through the concessionary fares working group to oversee implementation of free local off-peak bus travel through local schemes.

**Bill Butler:** I thank the minister for his answer. The minister will be aware that there has been a general welcome for the free concessionary travel scheme, which is financed by the Executive to the tune of £70 million. It is a popular innovation.

The minister will also be aware of the recent case involving two of my constituents, John and Lily Hind, who are both in their 70s, who were deposited on the roadside at Ballachulish, 14 miles from Fort William, because Scottish Citylink

refused to allow them to pay for a ticket for what would have been a new journey outwith the scheme's boundary. Is the minister concerned at the lack of common sense displayed by the bus operator and at what would seem to be an inflexible application of the issued guidance? Will the minister undertake to share that concern with Strathclyde Passenger Transport, which administers the scheme, and urge SPT to review the advice issued to bus operators?

**Lewis Macdonald:** I am aware of the specific case that the member mentioned. I have no doubt that the working group that is considering the implementation of the scheme will take such issues into account. However, it is for SPT, as the agency administering the scheme, to set the rules for the scheme. It is for SPT to work with the bus operators to ensure that the bus operators are fully aware of the rules of the scheme and how they should be applied.

**Mr Adam Ingram (South of Scotland) (SNP):** That is not an isolated incident. Is the minister aware that since the advent of the scheme there has been a whole new practice of shoving grannies off the buses in favour of paying customers? What will the minister do to stop that kind of discrimination?

**Lewis Macdonald:** I am aware that Citylink and other operators give priority to passengers who pre-book. That would be the same whether we were talking about long-distance coaches, air travel or other forms of travel. The incidents to which Mr Ingram refers are cases of that kind.

It is important that we are clear about the purpose of and the basis for our support for free local off-peak bus travel through the existing concessionary fare schemes. From the outset, it was made clear that the purpose of introducing such schemes was to close the opportunity gap and to allow the majority of weekly and daily journeys that are made by our pensioners and old people to be made for nothing. That is what the scheme is designed to achieve.

That is why we believe that the scheme should be implemented by local authorities through existing fare schemes. We will continue to work with local authorities, including Strathclyde Passenger Transport, because they are best placed to judge how to implement local schemes.

**Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con):** Does the minister agree that the concessionary fare scheme will allow elderly people to travel free to Prestwick airport to join the new scheduled flights to Malaga, Nice, Rome and Palma that were announced today?

**The Presiding Officer:** The minister will gather that Mr Gallie was not called during the previous question.

**Lewis Macdonald:** I gathered that, and I am glad that Phil Gallie has taken the opportunity to support our approach to integrated transport.

**Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab):** Is the minister aware that some bus operators are refusing to provide free bus travel to some of my elderly constituents who want to take up their entitlement? What can be done to ensure that bus operators comply with the conditions and terms of the scheme?

**Lewis Macdonald:** Again, as I said in my answer to Bill Butler's initial question, I recommend that Karen Whitefield takes up that matter with Strathclyde Passenger Transport because it is the administrator of the scheme. It is my understanding that all operators in the area should be signed up to the rules of the scheme. Those rules cover journeys of the kind that she has described and so it is for SPT to ensure that the bus operators are aware of how they should interpret the rules.

**The Presiding Officer:** Question 7 has been withdrawn.

#### **Official Veterinary Surgeon Services (Highlands)**

**8. John Farquhar Munro (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD):** To ask the Scottish Executive what the current position is with the award of contracts for official veterinary surgeon services in the Highlands. (S1O-5842)

**The Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care (Mrs Mary Mulligan):** The Meat Hygiene Service is undertaking a retendering exercise for official veterinary surgeons throughout Great Britain. The aim is to ensure the highest levels of food safety and to deliver the service at a competitive price while maintaining quality.

**John Farquhar Munro:** I thank the minister for her response. Will the minister raise the issue with her colleagues in London and seek to delay the award of the new meat inspection contract until a proper best-value review has been carried out, which I believe will support local vets retaining the contract? Will the minister also ensure that the new contract will provide the same level of meat inspection service as is currently provided to abattoirs throughout the Highlands and Islands?

**Mrs Mulligan:** The member will appreciate that it will be difficult to renegotiate contracts that were awarded only on 18 October, but it is possible for local vets to seek locum work for the OVSS and to seek new contracts, which may become available in future. As I have said, the intention behind the tendering process was to ensure that the highest possible quality of food safety was achieved. A determination of the ability of each contractor to achieve that was part of the tendering process.

We can assure John Farquhar Munro that the highest quality will continue to be delivered.

**Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** We are led to believe that the occurrence of tuberculosis in cattle is on the increase in several areas of Britain. With the continued rundown in the numbers of state vets, will the Scottish Executive make certain that there are enough vets to deal with the increased testing that may be required due to the rapid advance of the disease?

**Mrs Mulligan:** As far as I am aware, there is no increase in outbreaks in Scotland. However, we will continue to afford a service that monitors the situation. Surveillance is part of the system that the state veterinary service offers to ensure that diseases such as tuberculosis are contained, and eradicated where possible.

### Dead Horses (Disposal)

**9. David Mundell (South of Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Executive what support and guidance it now provides in relation to the disposal of dead horses. (S10-5814)

**The Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Ross Finnie):** I am unable to give the member any assistance as to how one might dispose of Conservative party leaders—*[Interruption.]* If anyone is flogging a dead horse it is certainly not the members on this side of the chamber.

The Animal By-Products Order 1999 requires that the carcasses of fallen animals, including horses, be disposed of by one of the methods specified in the order. Those are rendering, incineration, dispatch to knackers' yards or, in very limited circumstances, burial or burning on-farm.

Specific guidance on the disposal of fallen animals is contained in the Executive's document "Prevention of Environmental Pollution from Agricultural Activity", which is circulated widely to the agricultural community throughout Scotland.

**David Mundell:** As the minister and his coalition partners know very well, the Conservative party will never die. *[Laughter.]* Alas—*[Interruption.]*

**The Presiding Officer:** Order. Could we get back to the dead horses, please? *[Laughter.]*

**Ross Finnie:** We already are.

**David Mundell:** Alas, horses do die. Is the minister aware that with the introduction of the ban on burial, which comes into force in April, the closure of the Dumfriesshire hunt and the lack of rendering facilities, it will not be possible to dispose of a horse carcass within Dumfries and Galloway? Will he undertake to include horses in any uplift scheme that is introduced for cattle and

sheep carcasses, and will he undertake to consult equine interests on how that might be implemented?

**Ross Finnie:** There are two issues. The member is already aware that the number of horses that were sent to the hunts was a very small percentage, so that does not materially affect the situation.

On the new regulations, it is my understanding that Incineration Scotland, which is based in Dumfries, has confirmed to Executive officials that it is prepared to collect fallen horses, so there is no question of a lack of a facility.

On a general policy to deal with the implementation of the new European Union animal by-product regulation, we are in discussions with the industry and all associated parties with a view to trying to find a solution for a national collection service.

**John Young (West of Scotland) (Con):** Is the minister aware that at last week's meeting of the cross-party group on animal welfare, a number of representations were received from owners of horses? They expressed considerable concern, as has David Mundell, about the disposal of carcasses. I also got the impression that the operation of the regulations south of the border may vary from that north of the border. It would be worth while for the minister to contact the secretary of the cross-party group on animal welfare, because considerable information was imparted at the meeting on that subject.

**Ross Finnie:** If the member wishes to impart that information to me, I will be happy to deal with it.

### Maggie's Centres

**10. Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Executive whether it supports the establishment of Maggie's Centres and, if so, what assistance it will provide to see more centres established. (S10-5811)

**The Minister for Health and Community Care (Malcolm Chisholm):** Our cancer strategy acknowledges the importance of providing holistic care, which includes information and support for people who have cancer. Each Maggie's Centre is created in partnership with the national health service but operates as a separate organisation with charitable status. The Executive provides a grant of £15,000 a year towards the administrative costs of developing Maggie's Centres.

**Fergus Ewing:** Does the minister agree that it is important to explain to the public the role and function of a Maggie's Centre, which is to provide patients who have undergone cancer treatment with care, practical advice and support in an

informal, relaxed and friendly situation, where there is more time to spend with a patient than there is in a busy cancer hospital? Will he support the establishment of Maggie's Centres throughout Scotland, wherever they are unavailable? Will he support the campaign to establish a centre at Raigmore hospital in Inverness?

**Malcolm Chisholm:** I pay tribute to the work of Maggie's Centres. I was pleased to visit the Maggie's Centre at the Western general hospital in Edinburgh two weeks ago. Providing information and support is an important part of an holistic approach to cancer care.

I am pleased that new opportunities fund money has been awarded for Maggie's Centres in Highland and Fife. Some of that work is mainstreamed and a small proportion of the cancer strategy money has been allocated to information and support initiatives. We must acknowledge and pay tribute to the superb efforts of Maggie's Centres and all the people who help them to raise money.

**Dorothy-Grace Elder (Glasgow) (Ind):** I am sure that the minister wishes to join me in congratulating the readers of Glasgow's *Evening Times*, who have raised hundreds of thousands of pounds to create a Maggie's Centre in Glasgow.

Will the minister please pay attention to the plight of teenage cancer patients? Often, they are treated in places that contain patients who are three times their age. In the sensitive teenage years, people much appreciate being with young people of their age group. Will he consider creating a Maggie's Centre for teenagers?

**Malcolm Chisholm:** I join Dorothy-Grace Elder in paying tribute to Glasgow's *Evening Times* and its readers for their superb efforts to raise funds for the Maggie's Centre in Glasgow.

Dorothy-Grace Elder makes an important point about care for teenage cancer sufferers. Adolescent care in general was discussed at the Health and Community Care Committee's meeting yesterday. We must make progress on that, to ensure that the needs of teenage sufferers of cancer or other diseases are taken into account.

### **Persistent Young Offenders (Children's Hearings)**

**11. Mr John Home Robertson (East Lothian) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive what arrangements are being made to fast-track procedures for children's hearings to deal with persistent young offenders. (S1O-5835)

**The Minister for Education and Young People (Cathy Jamieson):** Three areas—Dundee, Ayrshire and East Lothian and the Borders—have

been selected to pilot fast-track procedures. I have established a multidisciplinary implementation group of interests from those three areas to finalise the practical arrangements for introduction. The group first met yesterday.

**Mr Home Robertson:** I am delighted that East Lothian will be one of the pilot areas. Will the initiative address the concerns of people such as the pensioner who attended my surgery this week, who was in despair that the police could not deal with children who repeatedly break his windows? Most important, will the initiative ensure that such youngsters and their families are dealt with urgently and effectively, to make communities safer and to prevent juvenile offenders from developing into adult criminals?

**Cathy Jamieson:** As I have said many times, I recognise the problems that persistent young offenders cause in local communities. The fast-track procedures will address the problems that John Home Robertson described. They will get young people who offend into the system quickly to ensure that appropriate action is taken and that they are placed on programmes that will tackle their offending behaviour.

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton (Lothians) (Con):** Would not it make sense to send persistent young offenders who are under 16 to youth courts and to leave children's hearings to deal with the at-risk children who need those hearings' help and support?

**Cathy Jamieson:** The member is aware that we have established a feasibility group, which covers Lanarkshire, to examine youth courts for some young offenders. Progress is being made on that as we speak.

**Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD):** Will the minister ensure that adequate provision is made in communities by councils or voluntary organisations for community sentencing and the other sentences that children's panels impose on children? There needs to be real back-up so that it makes no difference where the person is dealt with. Will we get that back-up?

**Cathy Jamieson:** I agree with the member on that point and that is why we put additional funding into the system. We have provided support for the voluntary sector, to prevent young people from getting into trouble in the first place and to boost the number of places that are available in intensive community supervision projects and to deal with very persistent young offenders.

**The Presiding Officer:** Question 12 has been withdrawn.

### NHS Acute Services

**13. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West):** To ask the Scottish Executive what plans it has for the reorganisation of national health service acute services. (S10-5827)

**The Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care (Mr Frank McAveety):** Planning for acute NHS services is primarily a matter for NHS boards, working with all their partners, to satisfy the guidance on consultation. I am pleased to see progress in consulting on and implementing acute service strategies in many parts of Scotland, as that is essential if Scottish patients are to get the modern services they need and deserve.

**Dennis Canavan:** Will the Executive ensure that reorganisation is based on objective criteria? If such criteria are applied in the Forth valley, the location of the proposed new general hospital must be the Royal Scottish national hospital site at Larbert. That site is owned by the national health service, is within easy reach of the vast majority of the population and has excellent connections by rail and road.

**Mr McAveety:** The member will accept that it would be wrong to prejudge the outcome of full public consultation. However, I reassure the chamber that the principal objectives are to ensure that an objective assessment of all the issues, including location and clinical considerations, is undertaken. Those objectives will be used in making the final decisions on acute services not only in the Forth valley but throughout Scotland.

The partners in the health board have been asked to use those objectives. Extensive consultation is under way and I am sure that many individuals in the Falkirk and Stirling area will make submissions. That process will identify what people consider to be the most appropriate location for future acute services in the area.

**Janis Hughes (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab):** Does the minister acknowledge that the reorganisation of acute services in Glasgow has raised very serious concerns about access to services? That is particularly the case for my constituents in Rutherglen and Cambuslang. Will he give a commitment that the Executive will introduce firm proposals for improved transport provision to accommodate those who will have great difficulty in accessing acute services?

**Mr McAveety:** The member has raised issues that are of public concern not only in the acute service reconfiguration in Glasgow but throughout Scotland. The fundamental issue is for health boards to work in partnership with other agencies to identify future transport provision. Where there are deficiencies in that provision, we should work with the boards and other agencies to identify

effective ways to deliver an outcome that will reassure the public that access will be considered in any final decision that is made about acute in-patient hospitals.

**The Presiding Officer:** Question 14 has been withdrawn.

### Farming

**15. Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Executive what its position is on the future of farming given the impending enlargement of the European Union. (S10-5826)

**The Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Ross Finnie):** The Executive's position on the future of agriculture was set out in the document entitled "A Forward Strategy for Scottish Agriculture", which was prepared with the prospect of enlargement in mind. The key objectives within that strategy are the creation of a prosperous and sustainable farming industry, better integration of farming with the wider rural community and an improved approach to co-ordinated agricultural and environmental policies. Enlargement simply underlines the need for Scotland to work towards these goals.

**Phil Gallie:** Does the minister share the frustration of the Prime Minister that Europe has failed to address the problems with the common agricultural policy? Will not that failure make matters worse for farming in Scotland? Given the frustration that the minister must feel about the common fisheries policy and its effects on Scottish fishing, does he take some solace from the fact that at least the United Kingdom can control its own economy?

**Ross Finnie:** Gosh, that was quite a convoluted way of getting to the point. Presiding Officer, did Mr Gallie miss another chance to ask a question earlier?

**The Presiding Officer:** No.

**Ross Finnie:** I just thought that I would check.

We really need to separate out all these issues. Whether we are talking about the threat of the World Trade Organisation, production-related subsidies or the environment, the hard fact is that over the next five to 10 years there will be a radical change in the level and method of support from the CAP. However, as I said in my response to Mr Gallie's first question, the key issue is to work with the industry to ensure that it is able to earn a far better return from its farming activity. At the same time, we must recognise that with the diversity of Scottish agriculture there will continue to be a need domestically to support remote, rural and fragile areas and those who are making a huge return to the public purse through their contribution to our environment.

**Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green):** I will return to Mr Gallie's original question, which was on farming. Given that the emphasis of the CAP has shifted away from production subsidies towards land management and that we are now facing the implementation of the water framework directive, will the Executive be up front in informing agriculture about its position in relation to the directive and use whatever tools there are in modulation and organic farming to incorporate the two issues positively for the sector?

**Ross Finnie:** We have been perfectly up front with the agricultural sector. For example, it was one of the many sectors that were consulted about the Water Environment and Water Services (Scotland) Bill. The need for the CAP to be integrated with the environment and to encompass a wider range of activities is also crucial to proposals to decouple in relation to those services. That issue forms part of the negotiations on CAP reform, in which we are actively engaged. However, as the questions from Mr Gallie and Mr Harper partly imply, those negotiations are not making great progress, for reasons that are in the public domain.

#### **Methadone (Prescriptions)**

**16. Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Executive how many people are currently being prescribed methadone on a regular basis. (S1O-5810)

**The Deputy Minister for Justice (Dr Richard Simpson):** As my response to S1W-28522 indicated, the information and statistics division in Scotland, which is examining prescription data to identify the numbers of people who are being prescribed methadone, aimed to have the information available by the end of October. Unfortunately, the very large number of prescriptions and the time-consuming methodology required to obtain the number of individual patients have delayed completion of the work. I understand that the exercise will be completed by the end of this month, and I will write to the member with the relevant information as soon as possible.

**Mary Scanlon:** Given that methadone is more addictive than heroin, is the minister concerned about the rising number of people who are on the methadone programme, the discretionary amount that is being prescribed and the fact that the programme is increasingly a containment rather than a harm reduction one? Furthermore, will he take this opportunity to put forward his views on using heroin instead of methadone for harm reduction purposes?

**Dr Simpson:** I do not think that I have the time to go into all the detail that Mary Scanlon has asked for. However, I will say that substitute

prescribing is vital to the programme of stabilising addicts and moving them on. Indeed, we produced a report last year that focused on exactly that issue. Clearly, we need an integrated programme that does not consist simply of prescribing a substitute opiate in the form of methadone—which, by the way, is as addictive as heroin but no more so. We must also apply all the other methods of rehabilitation to allow individuals to move off methadone and back into a normal life.

The stabilisation programme also protects our communities, because individual heroin addicts have an acquisitive crime rate of about £31,000 per annum. If those people are on methadone and are stabilised, communities are made safer because there is substantially less acquisitive crime. However, there must be an adequate dosage that is individually tailored to the patient. That presents a problem in some areas, where people apparently do not have enough training to know to give enough methadone. The Executive is committed to and is delivering on the programme, which will make a difference to our communities.

**Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP):** Based on the evidence from Switzerland, Germany and the Netherlands, three years ago in the Parliament I argued that the Executive should introduce an NHS heroin prescription programme to stabilise the lives of addicts and to cut crime across the country. The minister opposed it then. Has he changed his mind?

**Dr Simpson:** The Executive and the department that covers drug misuse are open to any evidence that is acquired from anywhere in the world about treating addicts and getting them off drugs. The indications from the Swiss programme are that it is successful and effective in reducing the level of acquisitive crime by addicts. The Dutch programme has not yet fully reported, we have not yet got the long-term follow-up on the Swiss programme, and the German programme is in the early stages of development. I will not close my mind to any evidence from anywhere that will help us to ensure that people get off drugs, but at present, neither the Executive nor the United Kingdom Government is minded to introduce direct prescribing of heroin.

## First Minister's Question Time

15:12

### Secretary of State for Scotland (Meetings)

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

To ask the First Minister when he next plans to meet the Secretary of State for Scotland and what issues he intends to raise. (S1F-2218)

**The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell):** We plan to meet later this month and I expect we will discuss our proposals for celebrating significant events in Scotland's history as a means of promoting tourism.

**Mr Swinney:** I am sure that the events will be of great interest but, today, it's the economy, stupid. Last night, the Minister for Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning admitted that the Scottish economy has underperformed in comparison with the rest of the UK for decades. Since the Executive came to power in 1999, the wealth gap has widened even further. How has the Government managed to make a bad economic performance even worse?

**The First Minister:** That is simply untrue, and I recall, if I have the exact words here, Mr Swinney saying on 17 August this year that

"the Scottish economy has plunged into recession."

That was a ridiculous assertion then, and what he says is a ridiculous assertion today.

The Scottish economy has far too low a growth rate, and that is why we have a policy that promotes research and development and getting science into products that are then sellable not just at home but abroad. It is also why we need to make the most of the current state of our economy here in Scotland, where unemployment is at its lowest for a generation, where interest rates were today confirmed yet again at only 4 per cent—the lowest rate for a generation—and where employment is higher than in almost all of our key European competitors.

**Mr Swinney:** The First Minister challenges the fundamental point that I make to him. Scotland's economy is now growing at a third of the level at which it was growing before the Executive took office in 1999. In the past three years, economic growth in Scotland has been at a third of the UK rate, manufacturing output has fallen at twice the UK rate, and the number of firms going bankrupt in Scotland is 14 times the UK rate. For three years, we have had the Government spinning on the economy—we have had another example of it from the First Minister today—but a bad economic performance is getting worse. Can the First Minister explain to Parliament why a country with such potential is falling so far behind?

**The First Minister:** It is blatantly obvious to anybody who has any understanding of the Scottish economy why it has had difficulties over the past 18 months. It is not just about the difficulties in either tourism or agriculture last year, but more significantly about our previous, far too heavy reliance on electronics. We know that that is the case and I suspect that most members with any sense, even on the Scottish National Party benches, will realise too that that is the case.

What is important is how we get out of the situation. In the chamber last week I talked of a fundamental divide, and I have to say that there is a fundamental divide on this issue too. We either have a strategy or we have a slogan. The strategy is to ensure that we have the level of productivity, research and development and investment in the Scottish economy in order to grow Scottish businesses and ensure that young people have the right skills and that our businesses can be promoted at home and abroad. Through that, we grow the strength of our Scottish economy and reduce our reliance on those substantial employers who were important in their time but who have now left us because of the decline in the electronics industry. The comparison between that steady strategy, which will grow the Scottish economy, and the strategy promoted by the Scottish National Party, which would take us away from our largest market at this vulnerable time for the Scottish economy, is a fundamental divide that the Scottish people understand fully.

**Mr Swinney:** The only steady thing about the First Minister's economic strategy is the steady decline that he presides over in Scotland. If all of what he says is the case, why is growth slowing in Scotland under the Liberal and Labour Administration? That is the reality. If the First Minister does not believe me, what about what one of Scotland's leading businessmen said this morning? He said:

"Scotland is sleepwalking into a disaster ... It's high time the people running Scotland recognised there was a problem and did something about it."

Is it not the case that Scotland is led by politicians who lack the will and a Parliament that lacks the powers to put Scotland at an advantage? Will the First Minister stop making excuses and start taking the powers that will make a difference for Scotland?

**The First Minister:** On that last point, can we just be honest, John, in the chamber and make absolutely clear what we mean? John Swinney does not mean that the Scottish Parliament should have a few more powers, he means that the Parliament should be separate from the rest of the United Kingdom and that Scottish companies should be separated from their main markets south of the border. The Scottish—

**The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel):** Question 2 is from David McLetchie. I am sorry, First Minister. I thought that you had finished.

**The First Minister:** I am sorry, Presiding Officer. Amid all the slogans, I was asked a question.

The strategy is right and should be pursued. The strategy is supported by the vast majority of Scottish companies that know what is needed, and the strategy will work. The economic strategy is working already. In Mr Swinney's constituency there has been a reduction in unemployment of 22.5 per cent—nearly one quarter—in the lifetime of the Parliament. Employment in Scotland is higher than it is in most competitor European countries, so unemployment is lower. Growth in Scotland will be strong again. *[Interruption.]*

**The Presiding Officer:** Order. We do not want a shouting match; this is not the House of Commons.

#### **Cabinet (Meetings)**

**2. David McLetchie (Lothians) (Con):** To ask the First Minister what issues will be discussed at the next meeting of the Scottish Executive's Cabinet. (S1F-2217)

**The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell):** The Scottish Cabinet will, as always, focus on the issues that really matter to the people of Scotland.

**David McLetchie:** I hope that one of those issues will be the fact that came out recently that, last year, for the first time in 10 years, there was a significant increase in the number of pupils leaving our schools with no qualifications. Does the First Minister accept that that is a worrying statistic that shows that far too many of our young people are being let down by an education system that the Executive is far too timid to reform?

**The First Minister:** First of all, our education system is significantly better than most other education systems in the world, but our education system can be much better. That is why this week I have not only laid out new options for children who are leaving school without qualifications or with qualifications that are inappropriate for their future working life but set out other types of flexibility and other options that will be available earlier in their school lives to allow them to progress at a faster rate. That is the future for Scottish education—a comprehensive and ideal principle of equal access for all, but also a flexible system to ensure that each child has the educational opportunities that they need and deserve in the modern world.

**David McLetchie:** Anyone who analysed the First Minister's speech earlier this week and that of the Minister for Education and Young People, Cathy Jamieson, would see that there has been a

great deal of playing on words as to exactly what comprehensive education means in modern Scotland.

I give the First Minister a specific example of where we could do with more diversity, choice and flexibility, about which he and the Minister for Education and Young People are always speaking. Will the First Minister follow the lead of his colleagues down south and dramatically expand the number of specialist state schools in Scotland? England has more than 900, specialising in business, technology, science, maths, languages, sport and the arts, and that number is planned to double by 2006. Scotland has a paltry nine, with no increase in prospect. Is that what he means by extending diversity and choice, when there is no hope of change or diversity in our education system?

**The First Minister:** I am happy to talk about comparisons between the Scottish and English education systems. The systems are, of course, different. They come from very different origins and have very different bases today. That is why, in implementing the ideal of equal access, different ways of reforming the system are appropriate in each country, as the Prime Minister confirmed again this week. I would not hesitate to remind everyone in the chamber that Scotland has a far higher percentage of young people leaving school with higher grade qualifications or equivalent, a higher number of young people with degree level qualifications, and higher levels of numeracy and literacy. In all those areas, the Scottish system is strong, but it must be better still. I am not interested in a few centres of excellence opted out of the Scottish education system. I want every school in Scotland to be excellent, and that is what we will achieve.

**Mr John McAllion (Dundee East) (Lab):** Will the First Minister assure me that his Cabinet will focus on the growing threat to Scottish manufacturing from outgoing foreign firms, such as the global giant ABB, which has announced its intention to shut down in Dundee after almost 70 years of power manufacturing there, throwing more than 200 workers on to the scrap heap? Can he assure me that the economic strategy that he referred to will include the intention to use whatever financial incentives are available to the Government—regional selective assistance, the provision of custom-built factories or anything else—to support the campaign of workers in Dundee to change that company's mind and to show the world that manufacturing remains important to Dundee and to Scotland?

**The First Minister:** We will certainly discuss all those options with ABB. In fact, the relevant minister is meeting representatives of ABB later this afternoon, so there will be an opportunity to



have further discussions. We must use all the tools at our disposal to ensure that we maintain the strong Scottish economy within the United Kingdom economy that provides stability for our current economic success. We must ensure not only that we have the skills and physical infrastructure that we require to make the Scottish economy successful but that we support companies through regional selective assistance and other measures, to help Scottish companies grow and to ensure a more sustainable future for companies from overseas that choose to invest in our country.

### **Skills Gap**

**3. Brian Fitzpatrick (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab):** To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Executive will do to address the skills gap outlined in the "Futureskills Scotland" report. (S1F-2235)

**The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell):** The "Futureskills Scotland" report is a significant and thorough analysis of the Scottish labour market. It found that employers consider skills gaps within their work force to be a greater concern than recruitment difficulties because of skills shortages. That means that in-work training is crucial, and that will be reflected in our lifelong learning strategy, which will be published next year.

**Brian Fitzpatrick:** Does the First Minister agree that the establishment of Scotland's new labour market intelligence unit offers the prospect of matching the people who want jobs with the jobs in search of people, and that on the basis of evidence, not anecdote? Will he notice particularly the gaps not so much in the provision of technical skills but in the instilling of so-called soft skills? Will he consider how we can best work to get our educational and training systems to deliver on soft skills and, in doing so, to boost employment rates and increase productivity across the Scottish work force?

**The First Minister:** It is important that public agencies do what they can to match the jobs to those who need them and vice versa. We must also ensure that we get the right balance of skills in our economy and particularly among our young people. It is the soft skills that have been neglected in our education system in recent decades, and it is precisely those skills that the flexibility and innovation that is going on in our schools today will be able to support and develop in years to come.

### **Regional Selective Assistance**

**4. Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP):** To ask the First Minister whether, instead of wasting public money on celebrating the union of the Crowns—

**The Presiding Officer:** No, Mr Neil. You must read out the question published in the business bulletin.

**Alex Neil:** I am coming to that. My question is relevant.

**The Presiding Officer:** No. You must—

**Alex Neil:** If you will let me finish the sentence—

**The Presiding Officer:** No. I will not, because you must stick to the question as published.

**Alex Neil:** Well, can I ask—

**The Presiding Officer:** Order. If you do not read out the question—

**Alex Neil:** I want to ask the First Minister whether it is not wiser to spend public money creating new jobs—

**The Presiding Officer:** I am sorry, Mr Neil, but I called you to ask question 4.

**Alex Neil:** I apologise, Presiding Officer. I realise that I was trying to read out my supplementary to question 4. [Laughter.]

To ask the First Minister whether the Scottish Executive will review the criteria for regional selective assistance and other forms of support available to incoming foreign companies. (S1F-2212)

I assure you, Presiding Officer, that that was not my supplementary.

**The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell):** I cannot wait for the supplementary question—it will be as predictable as such questions from the SNP sometimes are. I hope that Mr Neil will join one of our literacy programmes—that might help us in years to come.

**David McLetchie:** It is a numeracy programme that the First Minister wants.

**The First Minister:** At least we have enough members to count.

Regional selective assistance was reviewed last year to refocus our support on growing Scottish firms and higher-quality sustainable projects. Inward investment remains important to the Scottish economy, but I want growth to be based on high-value products that stem from increased knowledge, skills and research and development. Our support for business has been directed towards that strategy.

**The Presiding Officer:** We will now have the impromptu supplementary question.

**Alex Neil:** Rather than waste public money on celebrating the union of the Crowns and the union of the Parliaments, the latter of which in particular has cost us dear, will the First Minister use that

money instead to create new jobs for those workers who were made redundant in Mossend and Dundee as a result of decisions taken by international companies? Will he tell us whether it is true that around £3.75 million was made available to Chunghwa for training, but that that money was never used for training? Will he give a guarantee that any moneys that are recovered from regional selective assistance funds will be reinvested in local companies to create local jobs, which are badly needed in Mossend?

**The First Minister:** There are two parts to that question. We have made it clear publicly that we are disappointed by Chunghwa's investment decisions since it came to Scotland; it has let people down badly. We will pursue Chunghwa for the regional selective assistance that it needs to pay back to Scotland and we will ensure that that money is properly reinvested in the development of the Scottish economy.

The Scottish economy contains a number of important parts as well as our manufacturing industry. There is the tourism industry too, as has been highlighted. In the tourism industry, there is three times more investment from UK visitors than from visitors from elsewhere in the world—our links with the rest of the UK are therefore important for our tourism industry. A derisory response to an open invitation to join together and ensure that we celebrate internationally in a variety of ways various events from our past was a tragic error. In future, I hope that the SNP will be led by somebody who recognises better the importance of Scotland's history in selling our country at home and abroad.

### **Child Poverty**

**5. Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD):** To ask the First Minister what steps the Scottish Executive is taking to eradicate child poverty. (S1F-2229)

**The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell):** I want to live in a Scotland in which all children can reach their potential by ensuring that opportunities are available to all. That is why the Scottish budget contains measures to tackle child poverty through supporting vulnerable children in their early years, delivering excellent education and health services and investing in decent housing and communities.

**Mr Stone:** Does the First Minister agree that the particular needs of rural areas should be considered when child poverty action plans are being produced? Does he recognise that poor public transport and the lack of child care provision prevent many parents in rural areas from seeking paid employment?

**The First Minister:** Child care and transport are as fundamental issues in relation to employment in

Scotland's rural areas as they are in Scotland's urban areas. Much catching up must be done in respect of child care and transport in many parts of rural Scotland. That is why we include a calculation for rurality as part of the distribution formula in the allocation of our child care grant and why we are putting so much resource into the rural transport fund. That will ensure that rural transport projects are available to get people to work at the locations where they need to be and that their families are looked after while they are at work.

**Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP):** Will the First Minister be honest Jack today and acknowledge that child poverty has not been reduced since the coalition came to power? Will he further acknowledge that it is only by joining the consensus in Scotland for the Parliament to have economic powers that we will ever make a difference?

**The First Minister:** Levels of absolute poverty have dropped dramatically in Scotland in the years since 1997. The tens of thousands of Scottish children who benefit from the reduction in absolute poverty are children who are better served today than they were five years ago. That should be recognised by the SNP as well as by us.

It is vital not only that we reduce levels of absolute poverty in Scotland but that we close the gap between those of us who live more affluent lives and those who live on the poverty line. That is why, certainly initially, we are targeting children who are in families in the poorest communities and the poorest homes. They have to be targeted to ensure that they can rise out of that and have the opportunities in life that we want for all Scottish children.

## Quality of Life

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid):** The next item of business is a debate on motion S1M-3543, in the name of Andy Kerr, on quality of life, and on two amendments to that motion.

15:32

**The Minister for Finance and Public Services (Mr Andy Kerr):** In May, the First Minister spoke of the need to work together to tackle the issues that affect the quality of life of the people of Scotland. Those issues are shared by many in our communities. Today I had a visit from Strathaven Probus in my own community. Many members of that group agree with the common agenda on what we need to do to improve the quality of life for people.

However, the quality-of-life initiative is different. What the Executive does is always about improving the quality of life, but the initiative is based on a number of founding principles. We want to focus on the issues that affect every man and woman in Scotland—young or old—such as making our streets safer and cleaner, tackling vandalism, graffiti and dog fouling, and improving our parks and open spaces. As I have said before, those issues may not be matters of high politics but they are central to the lives of people in our communities.

Through the initiative, our actions will help: children who play in parks that are spoiled by litter and dog fouling; older people whose fear of crime leaves them feeling unsafe and vulnerable in their own community; and young people who want greater access to leisure facilities in their own areas. All those groups will benefit from our proposals.

The budget announcement in September set out our spending plans for improving the quality of life of all Scotland's citizens across our key priorities of education, health, crime, transport and jobs and our cross-cutting initiatives.

**Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green):** Does the minister agree that the proper use of landfill tax should be to encourage recycling? If he does, the £180 million that has been allocated over the next three years for schemes to improve the local environment should be applied to schemes that are funded by the landfill tax, which would free money up for recycling.

**Mr Kerr:** I am interested in the use of landfill tax moneys and have campaigned for many years for those moneys to go into recycling initiatives. Mr Harper will be aware that, in its spending review,

the Executive put historic amounts of money into the strategic waste plan initiative, which covers many of the issues that he raises. I am always interested in ways of leveraging more investment into recycling, which is a critical issue for the Executive and for Scotland and I am happy to correspond with Robin Harper on that matter.

In June, we made £95 million available to local authorities to help improve the quality of life in Scotland and I am delighted with the response that we have received from our councils. I placed trust in them and it has been repaid in full.

In Aberdeen, around 18,000 children are benefiting from free swimming lessons and in Argyll and Bute, money is being invested in upgrading roads, footpaths and lighting. East Renfrewshire Council has established a new graffiti removal squad; Falkirk Council is introducing an anti-litter campaign; and North Ayrshire Council is investing in recycling initiatives. Perth and Kinross Council is upgrading children's play areas; South Ayrshire Council is introducing traffic-calming measures around schools; and the council in my constituency, South Lanarkshire Council, is providing skateboard parks for young people. Only this morning, I saw the City of Edinburgh Council's new graffiti removal machine at work. All those positive initiatives were paid for by the quality-of-life money. The local authorities, which deliver the services, have welcomed the light-touch approach that we have taken to the allocation of funds.

**Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP):** The minister mentioned free swimming lessons in Aberdeen. He will be aware that, two years ago, Glasgow City Council implemented a programme of free swimming for under 18-year-olds, which brought about a remarkable improvement in the number of 18-year-olds using the swimming facilities, particularly in socially deprived areas and social inclusion partnership areas. Does the minister agree that a programme of free access to swimming and leisure facilities should be rolled out nationally?

**Mr Kerr:** I agree with Mr Sheridan, but I want to protect jealously the local choices that local councillors should be able to make. Therefore, I do not want to roll out initiatives across Scotland in the manner that he suggested; I want local leaders to lead. He can rest assured that many local authorities, including South Lanarkshire Council in my constituency, used some of the quality-of-life money to pay for free swimming lessons for primary 7 pupils. Many councils have used the money to provide for local issues and have made decisions that are relevant to their local communities.

In the budget announcement in September, we confirmed the allocation of an additional £180

million towards local quality-of-life initiatives over the next three years. I had a positive meeting earlier this week with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities at which we discussed, among other issues, arrangements for the allocation and distribution of those resources. We agreed that we should draw on the positive experience of how the £95 million was spent and that we should set broad themes while allowing local leaders to lead on behalf of their communities. Following consultation with COSLA, allocations for individual councils will be confirmed as part of the general local government settlement announcement in early December.

However, improving quality of life is not simply a matter of giving money to local authorities to tackle problems; it is also about partnership working between the Scottish Executive, local authorities, the Parliament, cross-party groups and other stakeholders. We have set up a group in the Parliament, with representatives from the four main parties, to propose ideas on specific quality-of-life issues that we can tackle.

Dog fouling is a prime example of the subjects that we want to tackle. Dog fouling on our streets and pavements and in our parks is of concern to everyone and is a good example of how the anti-social and irresponsible behaviour of dog owners who fail to clear up after their dogs adversely impacts on our daily lives. With that in mind, we have lent our support to Keith Harding's member's bill on dog fouling, which will, I hope, have cross-party support. With a fair wind, we should be able to get that on the statute book before the end of this parliamentary session.

Litter is an ugly intrusion on our lives but we must acknowledge that we are responsible for the problem collectively; we need to acknowledge the fact that the public cause litter and to ensure that local authorities have the powers that they need to control litter and act against litter louts.

**Bruce Crawford (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP):** Earlier this year, the Executive embarked on a consultation exercise on how litter control could be improved. When will we see the results of that consultation process?

**Mr Kerr:** We have received the final report. Its recommendations are being considered and our recommendations will follow in due course. I will compare the contents of the report with the proposals in Bruce Crawford's forthcoming litter bill and keep him informed of any action that we intend to take. We will make those decisions once we have considered the report fully.

The Executive sponsors Keep Scotland Beautiful, which operates education and training programmes throughout Scotland, particularly with our local authorities. On top of that, £550,000 has been secured for anti-litter initiatives.

Abandoned vehicles are a growing problem throughout Scotland as irresponsible owners try to avoid the costs of scrapping their vehicles. If we introduce new measures now, we will allow local authorities to deal much more effectively with that serious issue. The time restriction on councils for the removal of valueless abandoned vehicles will change from seven days to one day; the time scale for the removal of vehicles with apparent value has already been reduced from 21 days to seven days. The United Kingdom Government also plans to reform vehicle registration legislation to ensure that, in future, all vehicles can be traced directly to their keeper. That will make it harder for owners to evade their responsibility to dispose of vehicles properly.

On high hedges, I do not know whether Scott Barrie is in the chamber, but his member's bill—

**Scott Barrie (Dunfermline West) (Lab):** I am here.

**Mr Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab):** He is behind the hedge.

**Mr Kerr:** I peeked over the hedge and have seen him.

Scott Barrie's member's bill on high hedges has received support from more than 40 MSPs from all parties. The Executive has agreed to work with him on the bill with a view to making progress on it in the next parliamentary session.

I would like to address many other quality-of-life issues, but I am sure that other members will cover them during the debate. Youth crime and neighbourhood wardens have been mentioned in other debates, and I am sure that they will be mentioned again.

Fireworks remain a serious issue that blights communities throughout Scotland, particularly at this time of year. I am aware of people's concerns, which I understand and share. It is an absolute disgrace that our firefighters have been subjected to abuse by youngsters while trying to protect our communities. It is unacceptable that fireworks are thrown at firefighters, who are providing a public service.

As I made clear during question time last week, the Executive is committed to stamping out the injuries and misery that are caused to families and pets—and public servants—by the irresponsible use of fireworks. We need to tackle irresponsible retailers who abuse the voluntary code and sell fireworks to people who are under-age. Much work is already being done. For example, the Department of Trade and Industry recently announced further measures to tackle fireworks misuse, including a ban on the sale of air bombs, limiting the sale of noisy fireworks, and a crackdown on illegal markets in fireworks. I am

also grateful to have received the report from COSLA's fireworks task group and for the work that it has done on dealing with this serious issue. The report highlights the many issues that must be considered and the complexity of the problem. There are no easy or quick fixes, but I intend to take action.

**John Young (West of Scotland) (Con):** The minister may or may not have heard of the black cat firework, which is about two and a half feet high and about a foot wide and was introduced about two years ago. It has the velocity of a mortar bomb and its instructions clearly state that it is not to be detonated within 80ft of any structure. It costs approximately £70. Will the Executive consider outlawing completely the black cat firework, which is a highly dangerous weapon?

**Mr Kerr:** We read in the *Daily Record* this morning about another dangerous firework. We clearly need to take action on these issues, and I am seeking to do that. We are using all the powers that are available to us within the devolution settlement to address the issues and are working in partnership with the UK Government, the DTI and local authorities. We will crack down on this serious problem.

I hope that the Parliament agrees that considerable progress has been—and must be—made. We will continue to focus clearly on quality-of-life issues and we are working in partnership with COSLA to determine the most appropriate and effective way of distributing the resources that are available to the Scottish people through the quality-of-life programme.

The issues may appear trivial when they are taken in isolation, but when they are taken together, they have a significant effect on the quality of life of the young and the old in our communities—they matter greatly to the man and woman in the street. Those local issues prompt the largest number of letters to ministers, MSPs and councillors from members of the public. More needs to be done to improve the quality of life of the people of Scotland, and more will be done.

I move,

That the Parliament supports the work of the Scottish Executive, the all-party group on quality of life, local authorities and other stakeholders to improve the quality of life in Scotland's communities, notably the allocation to local authorities of £95 million this year and a further £180 million for the next three years to improve the local environment and the quality of people's daily lives.

**Scott Barrie:** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Is it in order for a member to intervene on a speech—as happened during the minister's opening speech—and then to leave the chamber before that speech is finished?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** It is in order, although it is not particularly courteous. All

members of the Parliament are required to be courteous to one another at all times.

15:45

**Tricia Marwick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP):**

It is impossible to walk down a street in Scotland without noticing litter, discarded chewing gum, graffiti-covered walls, vandalised swing parks and dog mess. All those issues affect the quality of life, and they all help to foster a belief on the part of some people in our communities that they have been abandoned by the police, local authorities and central Government. In May, Jack McConnell said that he wanted all parties in the Parliament to work together to tackle such issues, which blight so many lives. He spoke specifically about the need to

“deal with these issues and strengthen the legal framework.”

He continued:

“We have to give those who need them the powers to improve the quality of all lives throughout Scotland”.—  
[*Official Report*, 30 May 2002; c 12390.]

I will return to the legal framework later in my speech. Before that, I warmly welcome the financial commitment that the minister has made in the £95 million that was announced in August as part of the end-year flexibility money for specific quality-of-life projects. I know that COSLA, on behalf of local authorities, appreciates the way in which the money is being distributed and the lack of bureaucracy associated with the projects themselves. I welcome the opportunity that those projects have brought to many individuals in many communities.

After those warm words, however—I would not like to disappoint the minister—I turn to the SNP amendment in my name. COSLA claims that core local government services have been underfunded by £440 million over the past few years. If that is so, but if the minister does not accept that, that goes some way towards explaining why the streets are in the mess that they are in today.

Why are we having this debate? It is the job of the Parliament to put in place a legislative framework that will provide the necessary powers to deal with the problems that we are discussing. That is what Jack McConnell said he would do in May, but the Executive has singularly failed to do it. It should not be the role of the Executive to micromanage local government. It is up to local government to ensure that our streets are clean and free of graffiti, dog mess and the like.

This is not a council chamber but a Parliament, and the role of a Parliament is to legislate. We have more powers than a parish council, but it often seems that, instead of using those powers to legislate, some members on the Labour and

Liberal Democrat benches—I see that Iain Smith is leaving—

**Iain Smith (North-East Fife) (LD):** No, I am not.

**Tricia Marwick:** Some Labour and Liberal Democrat members would prefer that we spent our time dealing with matters that are rightly in the province of local government. The Executive's role is to ensure that local government has the powers and resources to deal with those matters. COSLA claims that local government does not have the resources and that the Executive has not put in place the legal framework that is needed.

Let me turn to the legislation that has been proposed by members to deal with quality-of-life issues, and examine whether Jack McConnell and Andy Kerr have worked

"with ... members to look together at how we ... can most effectively ... strengthen the legal framework."—[*Official Report*, 30 May 2002; c 12390.]

Keith Harding's Dog Fouling (Scotland) Bill is being considered by the Local Government Committee at stage 1. The Executive has stated that it has a number of policy concerns about the bill, and it is by no means certain that the bill will actually find Government support, as opposed to just support in principle. We wish to hear about that today.

Bruce Crawford will say more during his speech about his proposed litter bill, which has received no Executive support. Instead, the Executive has issued a consultation and it is by no means certain that a litter act will be in place by March 2003. Instead of going towards the legislative framework that we need, money has been allocated towards litter projects as part of the quality-of-life initiative, which is tackling the symptoms but not the cause.

At the first meeting of the all-party group on quality-of-life issues, to which Andy Kerr referred, I suggested that issues around litter, dog fouling, the proposed hedge control bill and fireworks licensing could be tackled through a review of the Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982. In July 1999, COSLA published a report in which it recommended amendments to the Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982. Did the Government act in 1999? It did not. Instead, the Executive decided to review the licensing and non-licensing provisions separately.

In a memo that I received as a member of the all-party group on quality-of-life issues, the minister stated:

"This approach was taken given the lack of legislative opportunity in view of other legislative priorities."

In the three and a half years of the current Executive and the five and half years of the Labour Government, the legislative framework has never been a priority.

**Mr Kerr:** The member speaks as though no legislation is already in existence in Scotland. There is provision for litter-control notices to be made to the occupier of litter-generating premises, litter wardens have the authority to serve £25 fixed penalties to litter offenders and non-publicly owned land may be designated as a litter-control area. Many powers are available. I know about more of them than many people do, because I worked in the department of Glasgow City Council that was responsible for dealing with litter. What is worse than Government introducing more legislation when it is not using current legislation effectively? That is the priority. That is why we choose to consult people before we legislate.

**Tricia Marwick:** The minister knows that anyone who has a view on this issue recognises that the present legislative framework is insufficient. A consultation exercise is not needed. If the legislative framework were sufficient, our streets would not be full of litter.

**Mr Kerr:** I take the point that the member is making. However, having worked in the industry for many years, I know that the required powers exist. Enforcement is extremely difficult. It is not easy for a Glasgow City Council cleansing worker to say to a member of the public who has dropped an empty cigarette packet on the ground, "I am sorry, but I must give you a £25 fine." It is our job to consult local authorities to ensure that they understand their role and we understand our role. That is exactly what we are doing through the review of current litter legislation.

**Tricia Marwick:** The minister makes the case for what I am proposing. As he says, individual local authority workers can do nothing about the problem. Current legislation on litter is not working. That is why the minister needs to examine the issue and to do something about it.

The legislative framework has never been a priority for the Executive. Since 1999, it has done nothing on the quality-of-life issues because of

"the lack of legislative opportunity in view of other legislative priorities."

No wonder the minister prefers to debate local government issues in the chamber. He does so to draw attention away from the Executive's failure to do what it was elected to do—to legislate on the issues that affect the quality of life in Scotland. An SNP Administration is committed to doing that in May 2003. We will ensure that the necessary frameworks are put in place, so that authorities have the powers that they need to act to ensure that our folk have the quality of life that they need and deserve.

I move amendment S1M-3543.1, to insert at end:

" , but notes COSLA's concerns over the funding of core services."

15:53

**Mr Keith Harding (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** The Scottish Executive is right to say that problems such as vandalism, graffiti, neighbourhood disputes, litter and dog fouling plague the lives of people throughout Scotland. However, the Executive is not alone in being aware of that simple fact. The bottom line is that its solutions to many of the problems are as outdated as they are ineffective.

One of the biggest blights on our communities today is crime and the fear of crime. Many people are too afraid to walk the streets, especially at night. Understandably, parents worry about the safety of their children when they go out to play. I am afraid that the situation has worsened under the current Scottish Government, whose research shows crime rates soaring—

**Iain Smith:** Will the member give way?

**Mr Harding:** If Iain Smith does not know that what I am saying is true, I will not take an intervention from him.

**Iain Smith:** It is not true.

**Mr Harding:** The Executive's research shows crime rates soaring as the result of inadequate punishment of criminals and a woeful lack of a visible police force. My colleagues will demonstrate that ably later in the debate, but I point out to Mr Smith that recorded crime in Fife—which I think he represents—is up by 5.9 per cent over the past year.

One vital step in improving quality of life is to decentralise power from the Government down to local authorities, community councils, voluntary organisations and other community groups. The people in those bodies know the unique solutions that are needed to solve the unique problems in their areas. The ministerial control freaks who govern Scotland through centralised uniformity do not. As the Scottish Tory local government spokesman and a member of Stirling Council, I am all too aware of the desperate need for local government to be set free from the overbearing control of Scotland's centralising Government. Even Labour councillors will say the same thing. John Pentland, North Lanarkshire councillor and COSLA finance spokesman, said that when it comes to local government:

"the Scottish Executive demonstrates an unhealthy concentration on national priorities."

The Scottish people need to have their aspirations met. Those are everyday aspirations for such things as good toll-free roads, smooth and litter-free pavements, and libraries and leisure centres to name but a few. The best way to do that is to offer the choice and diversity that decentralisation to local government will bring.

Local government will flourish. With more power will come more accountability and legitimacy, which will attract more candidates to an increasingly desirable post. Councillors will be forced to deliver for fear of being removed from office by their electorate. That is local democracy in action and it can only be of benefit to the public.

We welcomed the initiative, which the First Minister announced in Aberdeen, to listen to ideas from whatever party or individual to address these matters. On a personal level, I am particularly pleased that the Executive has indicated its support in principle for my Dog Fouling (Scotland) Bill. In response to Tricia Marwick, I emphasise how impressed I have been with the Executive and how grateful I have been for its working with me to address areas of concern.

On 2 November, Tony Blair described anti-social behaviour such as vandalism, graffiti and fly-tipping as

"probably the biggest immediate issue for people in the country".

He said that the issue would form the centrepiece of the Queen's speech, which will be delivered later this month. It is only a pity that it has taken him more than five years to reach conclusions that are similar to ours.

The Scottish Conservatives look forward to contributing ideas and policies that will address the issues that have such a detrimental impact on people's everyday lives in communities throughout Scotland.

I move amendment S1M-3543.2, to leave out from "notably" to end and insert:

"but regrets that measures being taken are likely to prove ineffective unless a much more robust approach is taken to issues of disorder, vandalism and violence which afflict far too many of them."

15:57

**Iain Smith (North-East Fife) (LD):** I seem to remember in the dim and distant past, when I was at a young Scottish Liberal conference, that we debated a motion in favour of niceness and against sin. Being young Liberals, of course, we referred back the bit about sin. The Executive motion has a similar feel to it in some ways. I do not know a great deal about motherhood, but I know quite a bit about apple pie.

Although hospitals, schools, tackling crime and improving the environment are central issues that the Liberal Democrats, in this Liberal Democrat-Labour partnership Executive, feel are at the heart of government, it is important to remember that the small things sometimes affect the lives of our constituents most immediately. Those things include broken pavements, poor streetlights,

untidy streets, poorly maintained parks and open spaces and broken windows in public buildings that become a magnet for vandalism to neighbouring properties. We have problems with kids hanging around bus shelters and on street corners causing a nuisance to residents because they have nothing else to do. The place where a mattress has been dumped suddenly becomes a rubbish tip, because everyone decides that it is an official tip and dumps their rubbish there. Dealing with those things is very important, as is tackling dog fouling and problems with fireworks, which have been mentioned.

I agree to some extent with what Tricia Marwick said. Some of the problems have been caused by years and years of cuts to local government budgets by the Conservative Government. The so-called cinderella services are often the easiest to cut. One cuts the frequency of street cleaning or grass cutting. One cuts the opening hours of leisure centres or increases the charges. One cuts funds for library books and the amount of money going into footpath repairs, and increases the time that it takes to respond to problems with vandalism, thereby allowing areas to become magnets for more vandalism. One cuts the amount of money that is spent on youth workers or grants to voluntary organisations. All those things affect the problems around the quality of life that we have today.

This Liberal Democrat-Labour Executive has begun to address those problems by finally getting round to providing real long-term increases in local government funding. We have reversed the long-term decline in funding. We have increased the amount of money that is going into capital so that new facilities can be developed and we have provided additional support in recent years for improvements such as road and pavement repairs. The minister referred, rightly, to the end-year flexibility funding of £95 million that local government got this year. There are new resources to allow local government to act on some of the quality-of-life initiatives that are needed—not the initiatives that the Executive or the Parliament says are important, but the ones that councils think are important for their communities.

In my area, Fife Council has obtained about £6.25 million from that money, which it has spent on a number of valuable initiatives to help communities. For example, £1.5 million has been spent on outdoor recreation, including the provision of skateboarding facilities. The local young people have not only welcomed the new skateboarding facility in Cupar, but taken part in its design. That facility will be of great benefit to the area.

**Bruce Crawford:** I have listened with interest to what the member has said. Does he agree with COSLA's assessment that, over the past three years, local government has been underfunded by £440 million, or was that assessment not accurate?

**Iain Smith:** The member is not accurate in his quoting of the figures. In the document to which he refers—COSLA's submission to the Local Government Committee on the budget process 2003-04—COSLA was referring to what it thought would be needed for the next three years, not to what had not been provided in the previous three years.

It is right that local government will always look for more money—that is local government's job. If I were still in local government, I would ask for more money. The debate is not about that; it is about the new, additional resources that are going into local government.

**Tricia Marwick:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Iain Smith:** I am sorry but I do not have time, as I am in my final minute.

In Fife, additional money is being spent on sports promotion; £0.25 million is being spent on road safety; £0.75 million is being spent on roads and pavement repairs; £0.5 million is being spent on neighbourhood safety and lighting; £0.5 million is being spent on tackling graffiti, vandalism and litter; and £600,000 is even being provided to deal with Fife's woefully inadequate record on recycling. All those measures will improve the quality of life in Fife.

The Conservatives concentrate on dealing not with the causes of problems, but with the symptoms. Their amendment refers to a more robust approach to disorder issues. We acknowledge that that is important—that is why Jim Wallace continues to provide funding for record numbers of police in Scotland. That spending is having a real impact on dealing with the fear of crime. Public attitude surveys show that such fear has fallen rather than increased since the Executive was formed.

Much more remains to be done in the long term. The Local Government in Scotland Bill will make more powers available to local government, which will help local government to take such initiatives further. Community planning and the power of well-being are new tools in local government's toolbox for dealing effectively and imaginatively with the issues that the debate has highlighted.

It is vital that all the agencies work together to develop new solutions to some of the problems that exist in the health service, the education service, community and leisure services, the



police and social work. All those agencies should work together to develop ways of dealing with problems. In my communities in North-East Fife, joint action plans have been drawn up to deal with some of those problems. That is the way forward if we want to improve the quality of life of our citizens.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I have nine speakers for the open debate. I will try to squeeze in everyone, but John Young, Maureen Macmillan and Tommy Sheridan should be thinking of speeches of no more than two to three minutes.

16:03

**Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab):** I think that Tricia Marwick misled the Parliament at the end of her speech when she said that an SNP Administration would focus its attention on quality-of-life issues. Her party's published policy would demand it to concentrate the mass of its legislative attention on constitutional issues. That marks a real difference between the policy of the Labour party and the coalition and the policy programme of the SNP. That is the honest truth. If Tricia Marwick read her party's policy documents, its constitution and its proposals, she would find out what priority the SNP gives to quality-of-life issues and the issues that are important to the people of Scotland—health, education, transport, jobs and enforcement.

**Tricia Marwick:** Des McNulty accuses me of misleading the Parliament. I am glad that he has such fascinating bedtime reading. I assure him that the SNP manifesto will contain a commitment to review the Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982. It is important that such a review is conducted and it is obvious that the Executive and the party of which Mr McNulty is a member will do nothing about the quality-of-life legislation that is needed to make a difference.

**Des McNulty:** To be honest, we are putting a substantial amount of money—nearly £100 million—into dealing with the quality-of-life issues that concern people. Tricia Marwick is talking about balance within the legislative agenda, but the SNP's position is clear and it is not how Tricia Marwick has presented it.

We must tease out some of the important issues surrounding the way in which funding is being delivered. The money is being channelled through local government, as is the money for the better neighbourhood services fund. That is a positive step because it blends together local choice and national accountability.

Local government is beginning to have to think about changing the way in which it tackles problems. Perhaps local government has not been

sufficiently realigned so that it can make best use of its resources. Resources are best used when they are associated with community empowerment and engagement.

Local government in Scotland has traditionally seen itself as a deliverer of services. It must begin to see itself in the broader context of being involved in governance issues, working in partnership with local communities and taking on board their priorities and concerns. Local government must build in those priorities and concerns not just through use of the additional resources that are being made available by the Executive, but by bending its core services to better meet those priorities and concerns. It is important to empower local people.

Quality-of-life policies must focus on poorer communities. I represent Clydebank, which is one of the poorer communities in Scotland. Along with the remedial targeted action that can be taken through the use of resources that are being made available to improve the quality of life, a more fundamental transformative process has to take place. In the context of Clydebank, that process would mean giving the area a hand up rather than a handout. It would mean dealing directly with how we can change Clydebank from an area of high unemployment to an area that has a stable economic future, stable services and a stable identity.

I am not just talking about ensuring that my area gets its fair share, although that is something to which I pay quite a lot of attention. I am talking about trying to engage with local people—which I have done—and developing an holistic, integrated approach so that we can deal with the most basic issues such as litter, vandalism and crime and build those issues into the debate about how we transform our communities. We do that by making education and social services better and by getting better transport that meets the needs of local people.

Members of the Parliament can do an important job by becoming catalysts for implementing that agenda. It is not the case that just local government should have the power of engaging with local communities. As individual members, we have an interest in engaging with our local communities. We have to listen to what people are saying and to their priorities, and we have to find ways of delivering effectively on those priorities. The Executive is providing a valuable resource for that, but it must be associated with the use of the full range of available resources so that we can engage with people and deal with their concerns.

16:08

**Shona Robison (North-East Scotland) (SNP):** Fireworks are a major quality-of-life issue and I

was pleased that the minister addressed that issue in his speech. I could not agree more with his comments, particularly about the disgraceful attacks on firefighters by youths throwing fireworks. That is a particular problem in Dundee and Tayside and it is something that everyone in the chamber should condemn.

Although the minister said that more would be done, he did not tell us much more than we know already. I thought that he was about to say what would be done and when it would be done. A bit of detail would be nice.

We have just been through another Guy Fawkes season. For many people, it was a fun night with a safe firework display for all to enjoy. For others, however, it was a nightmare because of the misuse of fireworks in the run-up to 5 November. It will also be a nightmare in the weeks to come, because the misuse does not stop on 5 November.

This year, police throughout Scotland have so far been called to 4,000 firework incidents, more than 2,000 of which have involved Strathclyde police. Firework-related injuries and disturbances are on the increase, according to the DTI report. Last year, there was a 35 per cent increase in the number of injuries in Scotland. This year is unlikely to be any different.

Many of the problems are caused by young people who manage to obtain and misuse fireworks. A recent survey in Edinburgh found that more than half the stores that were visited in the days before bonfire night—eight out of 15—were breaking the existing law. A licensing scheme is important, because not only will it prevent such retailers from selling fireworks, but it will provide a mechanism to ensure that retailers adhere to codes of practice that local authorities develop to lay down, for example, when and where fireworks are sold. A scheme could also restrict the number of outlets by restricting the number of licences that are issued.

We agree on all those points. My proposal for a licensing scheme has been warmly received by members from all parties in this Parliament. It has also been hugely welcomed by the community groups and organisations that have responded to me. I have received more than 150 responses so far, in which people have cited dreadful experiences for themselves, for people they know, such as families and relatives, and for household pets.

We know what the problem is and we know that there is a solution through a licensing scheme. The Minister for Finance and Public Services talked about the need to crack down on the misuse of fireworks, but the detail of how and when that will be done was missing. I am pleased

that the Executive has stopped talking about the issue being reserved and that it is moving in the right direction, but we now need a clear commitment to amend section 44 of the Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982. That is the only way that I can see of taking the issue forward.

A clear commitment to that today would send out a good message to all the community groups and organisations that have written to me, and to the Scottish public, that we are serious about this matter and that by this time next year we will have a licensing scheme in place. However, we have not heard that today, which is a matter of regret. The measures could be implemented quickly and easily, as the minister said, through regulations, and that could be done well in advance of the election. We seek a commitment today. When will the minister implement the proposals?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call John Young. As you have swapped slots, Mr Young, you have up to four minutes.

16:12

**John Young (West of Scotland) (Con):** Thank you, Presiding Officer. I will make the best of it.

I agree with Shona Robison: we need some clear-cut rules in this game, because what we are getting is far too fudgy. I sometimes feel that we are living in biblical times. We have a prophet in the shape of Tony Blair and we have his followers scattered throughout the country—indeed, we are in the presence of some of those followers today.

Most of us would agree with the views that have been expressed but, as was said time and again by earlier speakers, views alone are not enough. We have heard that Blair has declared war on spray painters and gum droppers, and that youths under 18 will be banned from buying paint sprays. That is fine, but it is in reality often difficult to know who is under 18, because some 15 and 16-year-olds would pass for 19. Also, some 18-year-olds or young adults could buy paint sprays on behalf of those who are under 18.

There will be more on-the-spot fines for anti-social behaviour. That will be great, but who will implement it? Will it be a 55-year-old anti-social behaviour warden with bad feet who could not catch the sprinting escapers? Even worse, some of those sprinting escapers could turn on that 55-year-old and commit violence.

Mobile job centres will tour inner-city streets looking for workshy benefit claimants. How will that work? Will they stop people who look workshy? There might be some people here who look workshy, for all I know. Indeed, in some areas the mobile job centres are likely to be met with an even greater hail of bricks and bottles than are firemen.

Chewing gum will be classed as litter and shopkeepers will be asked to sign voluntary agreements not to sell it. Why not ban outright that American product that is bad for teeth?

There will, as Shona Robison mentioned, be restrictions on fireworks, but what restrictions? The current restrictions are blatantly broken. To the best of my knowledge, in a 12-month period no trading standards officers have apprehended any shopkeepers for illicit sales of fireworks. Indeed, every year, from mid-September onwards, we have a series of mini Stalingrads throughout the country.

All sorts of people, including binmen, will be entitled to levy on-the-spot litter fines. We can imagine the scene when the accused has only a £20 note and the binman has no change. Bin uplifts would fall behind schedule. Andy Kerr told us that he worked for Glasgow City Council and indeed he did—I know because I was a Glasgow councillor at the time—but he knows deep down that binmen have enough to do. The Executive might as well ask someone to dress up as Pinocchio to approach the accused. Andy Kerr knows it and it is no wonder that he and Peter Peacock are smiling; they know the truth.

I have six brief proposals, which represent my personal views. We should introduce identity cards, as during the war. As an 11-year-old, even I had such a document. Most countries have that facility, which would identify culprits. People who are found guilty of the offences that have been described and who are given community service orders should be dressed in appropriately coloured overalls and given unpaid work clearing up the mess that they have created.

The sale of fireworks should be restricted and we should have strong and effective measures that work. For a start, we should ban all fireworks imports from the far east because, as HM Customs and Excise says, many of those fireworks are dodgy.

If the owners of street furniture were responsible for cleaning it, that would mean cost increases for law-abiding citizens, so why not hammer the culprits? A massive propaganda campaign should be launched, using footballers, pop idols and all those on TV and radio whom youth admire. Finally, I propose that after three strikes, the names of offenders should automatically be published.

Such measures would be effective. They are not the mumbo-jumbo that we hear time and again. Next year, the year after that and the year after that, a Labour member will stand up—if Labour remains in power, which I doubt—to send out the same old message, which is a load of crap. I am sorry; perhaps I am not allowed to use that word.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr Murray Tosh):** I do not think that you are.

**John Young:** I suggest instead that what they will say will be a load of rubbish.

16:16

**Dorothy-Grace Elder (Glasgow) (Ind):** Mr Young's colleague Keith Harding's Dog Fouling (Scotland) Bill aims to remove that substance from pavements. The distinct odour of freshly baked apple pie has been circulating in the chamber. That happens quite often, but we cannot mock—do not knock it until you have tried it. Apple pie is, at least, fairly wholesome. Such issues concern people on their doorsteps. Most people are far more concerned about the issues that members from all parties and none have discussed today than they are about the euro, the Dow Jones index or whatever. People want to know what the Parliament is doing for them in their local communities.

Thank goodness that some areas are taking traffic calming measures. Traffic is so appalling that people have poor quality of life from the moment that they step outside their homes, whether their homes are in rich or poor areas. What has been called carmaggedon has taken place over the country. Recently, in Glasgow's east end, a little boy of four years old was killed while trying to cross Camp Road. People in the Garrowhill and Baillieston areas whence that little boy came are not prepared to let that tragedy be overlooked. They are right to hold public meetings to demand extensive traffic calming measures throughout residential districts. Why should they not have such measures? Some people told me that they had moved to Garrowhill because they were told that it was a safe place in which to bring up their children, but they have found that their children are not safe, although not because of crime. Why should vehicles be allowed to thunder through any residential area? Why should not their progress be made more difficult by many traffic calming moves?

I was delighted to hear that swimming facilities are being offered free from Aberdeen to South Lanarkshire. However, let us contrast Glasgow with Edinburgh. Glasgow City Council closed a beautiful Edwardian pool in Govanhill, despite the protests of 40,000 people, but a beautiful Edwardian pool in Portobello in Edinburgh was renovated and reopened thanks to the local people and the City of Edinburgh Council. While people in Edinburgh celebrated the regeneration of that pool—other pools are also being renovated in Edinburgh—a police horse charge was sent against people in Govanhill in Glasgow who were protesting about their pool's closure. That is a tale of two cities.

A person who suffers from chronic pain cannot have good quality of life, no matter where they are in the financial gradings of the country—rich or poor. I am glad to say that the Scottish Parliament has taken up the matter of chronic pain and that 130,000 members of the public backed the Parliament in our efforts to get better forms of pain relief administered by more NHS pain clinics, and to reach into areas such as the Highlands, where there is absolutely no provision outside of hospice care. People, including those with arthritis and back injuries, can be restored to jobs—I am thinking of firemen and nurses. We are lucky that the public have told us what they want, but have we done it yet? I refer that question to the minister for him to refer it in turn to his colleague, the Minister for Health and Community Care.

16:21

**Mr Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab):** I am sorry, Presiding Officer; I thought that I was to speak later.

There are those who would sneer at the debate because the idea of the Parliament talking about litter, dog fouling and fly tipping offends them. I agree that those issues might not be at the top of the political agenda in Edinburgh's coffee shops or broadsheet opinion pages, where people would rather talk about constitutional niceties or political philosophies. The issue is one on which the politicians and the people know better; they know that the railings and the palings matter. The debate even brought a lukewarm welcome from the nationalists today, so sensitive are they to political opinion.

The environment matters to me and to my constituents, but we are concerned less about the hole in the ozone layer, genetically modified crops and having a sea that is safe for dolphins than we are about having streets that are safe for our daughters, neighbourhoods that are free from litter, walls that are free from graffiti and safe open spaces in which our children can play free from exhaust fumes, used needles and dog muck. Sadly, there are neighbourhoods in Greenock and Inverclyde—indeed, throughout Scotland—that do not come up to that standard. Despite the strenuous efforts of proud local residents to keep standards high, all too often that can seem to be a losing battle. Communities are entitled to expect support from the Parliament and from the law in their efforts to safeguard their neighbourhoods. This debate should be a tribute to those efforts.

The money that the Executive has allocated to tackle crime and vandalism is to be welcomed and the partnership that we have with local authorities and the communities that they serve is having an immediate impact on people's quality of life throughout Scotland. It is having an impact

through free swimming lessons, anti-litter campaigns, improved roads and lighting, provision and improvement of play areas and road safety measures. The list could go on.

The announcement on fireworks will be particularly welcomed in the chamber today. The clear message from the street is for us to press on and make the difference; we are to press on with initiatives on youth crime and neighbourhood wardens and we are to reject the whinging of the nationalists. As a party, the nationalists exist to stop the Parliament and the Executive achieving and, in the process, to criticise all of our efforts. We must press on and make the difference.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I apologise to Mr McNeil for failing to tell him that he was to be called next.

16:24

**Bruce Crawford (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP):** Duncan McNeil would have been better sticking to his notes, because when he went off them at the end, he really lost it.

Scots have a deserved reputation for being a proud nation. Wherever Scots go in the world, they can be sure that they will defend the name of Scotland, but when it comes to the menace of litter, why are our people not willing to show the same spirit in relation to their own front doors or back yards? For too long people have taken a walk-on-by attitude to litter. Why is it important to tackle that attitude? Litter has a negative effect on the quality of life. It impacts on the economy and on our capacity to attract tourists to local environments in which we must all live our lives.

How can we realistically expect the people of Scotland to care more about the future of the planet if their own back yard has been despoiled by litter? That echoes some of the sensible comments that Duncan McNeil made earlier.

It is therefore imperative that the nation as a whole tackle this menace. In order to eradicate the problem, we must begin to instil in people a pride in Scotland's culture. We need effective campaigns as well as greater education and awareness raising; however, all the education in the world will not by itself change the culture. As an environmental health convener from 1988, I was the first person in Scotland to employ litter rangers, who served fixed penalties on litter louts under the Environmental Protection Act 1990. However, their primary job was to get into schools and raise pupils' awareness about the problems of litter.

It is a pity that many of those young people ever grew up, because when they turned into adults, all their responsibility genes seemed to evaporate.

Although education will help, we have to get serious and tackle the serial litter louts who have not got the message. It is time to adopt a no-holds-barred approach and to create a climate of zero tolerance. We must declare war on the litter louts and hit them where it hurts most—in their pockets.

People hoped that the passing of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 would mean a major change in how litter was dealt with. Although it is true that the 1990 act introduced some major steps to combat the menace of litter, experience has shown that there are major weaknesses in its enforcement provisions and in the powers that are available to local authorities. The minister said that many powers already exist to deal with the problem and that we must just use them better. Moreover, he claims that he still has some sympathy for local authority workers. That might be true, but the reality out there is different. For example, in its response to my member's bill on litter, Scottish Natural Heritage told me:

"In principle, we support the aim of the Bill to strengthen litter control."

COSLA also supported my view that existing legislation needs to be reviewed. Furthermore, the City of Edinburgh Council said:

"A fundamental of the fixed penalty scheme is that individuals who litter are witnessed and properly identified. It is perhaps this factor more than anything else that leads to a relatively small number of fixed penalty notices being served."

There are fundamental weaknesses in the existing legislation and we still await the minister's proposals. Unfortunately, because he has kicked in his consultation process, everything has been stalled and the non-Executive bills unit cannot proceed with my bill. That raises a question about the Executive's real intention in kicking in its consultation. Is that consultation simply a stalling mechanism? It has taken the Executive a long time to come up with the goods and it is time that it delivered.

16:28

**Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP):** It is important that politicians should be serious about what they say and what they endeavour to achieve. The problem with some of the minister's remarks about Glasgow is that the money does not match the rhetoric. We can no longer replace proper main-line funding with funds that are available at the end of the year simply to try to hide underspends in Scottish Executive budgets. As far as Glasgow is concerned, we have seen the lowest increase in expenditure from the Scottish Executive to any mainland council in Scotland. We are receiving even less money from the Executive than we received from a Tory Government that tried to decimate the city.

In the "Scottish Household Survey" for 1999-2000 Glasgow residents ranked the aspects of their neighbourhoods that they particularly liked: 43 per cent thought that their neighbourhood was quiet and peaceful; 34 per cent thought that they had good neighbours; and 33 per cent thought that they had convenient shops. That gives the lie to the image of Glasgow that is sometimes portrayed. Some of its problems get far too bad a press, while the good parts are often not highlighted enough.

However, in relation to the aspects of their neighbourhoods that Glasgow residents disliked, 21 per cent believed that the biggest problem was young people hanging about and 17 per cent said that the biggest problem was vandalism. Some 16 per cent said that drug abuse was the biggest problem. I do not think that it is any accident that the three highest priorities of ordinary citizens in Glasgow are all related. It is obvious that a lack of facilities and engagement with constructive recreation for our young people will lead to young people hanging about. If young people hang about, that can unfortunately often lead to vandalism and drug abuse, although we should not allow ourselves to go down the road of labelling all young people as being the same. The overwhelming majority of young people are good and positive, and we should help them to realise their talent instead of condemning them.

People say that money is not everything—usually those who have plenty of it. Some 84 per cent of households in Glasgow have a net income that is less than £20,000 a year, which is a disgrace. Unless we are willing to address that problem and improve the disposable income of ordinary people in cities such as Glasgow, we are never going to improve those citizens' quality of life.

16:31

**Mrs Lyndsay McIntosh (Central Scotland) (Con):** I want to concentrate my remarks on what happens when the vital ingredients in a good quality of life do not exist and when the failure of police, individual or community efforts to address disorder, vandalism and violence leads to a person taking his or her own life. Most particularly, I would like to target my remarks at support for people who have failed in their attempts to end their lives and at the desolation, isolation and desperation of the friends and family who are left behind when a person succeeds in doing so. I want to talk about suicide. For those who are of a sensitive or caring disposition, the subject is challenging. I have no wish to make more difficult the task of coming to terms with life as it is, rather than as we would wish it to be.

The minister mentioned children in his opening remarks, so I will channel his thoughts towards

youngsters' being bullied. We should think about 16-year-old Nicola Raphael or 12-year-old Emma, who attended Broughton High School, both of whom committed suicide as a result of being bullied at school. I can think of nothing more crucial to the quality of life of our youngsters than that.

Emma's sudden and horrendous death resulted in a campaign called "Save Our Kids" by a national daily tabloid newspaper. The beneficiary was to be Facilitate Scotland. Support poured in from celebrities and politicians. Money also poured in, and we raised awareness and expectations and greatly increased inquiries. Let us leave aside for the moment the fact that the director of that organisation has been removed from post; that is not the issue. The charity's doors have been closed by the judicial factors and some 36 people are being counselled by Facilitate Scotland volunteers without premises and using mobile phones.

Many members are parents, and in the largesse of which the minister spoke earlier, please will he consider what we can do to address the problem of children being bullied? For them, quality of life as we think of it is not the big point.

16:33

**Maureen Macmillan (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** I want to concentrate my remarks on what is happening in the Highlands, because through additional funding, a significant number of projects are being established that provide real evidence of central and local government working in partnership to improve communities in the north. It is easy to look at the Highlands and think that quality of life there is not a problem and that it is already high. It is high for many, but like other areas of Scotland, improvements are needed, particularly in the less advantaged areas of our towns.

The minister informed us that the Highland Council will receive a total of £4.2 million; the council is already putting that to good use. It is using the money on two fronts. It is tackling services for children and young people, which are extremely important. There are a raft of projects planned, providing such services as skateboard parks in Nairn, Ardersier and Drumnadrochit and youth shelters in the Croy and Dalneigh areas of Inverness. The council is using the money to improve playgrounds and to reduce waiting lists for swimming lessons.

There is money available in Caithness for the family centre in Wick and playgrounds there are being refurbished. In Badenoch and Strathspey there are breakfast clubs and grants are available for disabled children's groups and outdoor

education equipment. There is a list of projects that are aimed at enhancing the quality of life for young people. By providing such services to young people, we can tackle youth disorder problems before they start.

The Highland Council is targeting environmental themes. Money is available for the enhancement of Fort William High Street, for encouraging recycling and waste minimisation and for improved speed-reduction measures. Improving bus shelters in many areas of the Highlands is also a priority because a bus shelter in the middle of a moor on a wet and windy day is not a luxury; it is a necessity.

Those measures are not trivial and unimportant because, as all members know, the issues that I have mentioned are the ones that our constituents get annoyed about. They want better facilities, they want graffiti to be tackled, they get fed up when cars travel far too fast down local roads and they get angry when they have to stand in the rain waiting for a bus.

I was particularly pleased to hear what the minister said about abandoned cars. That issue rankles in the west Highlands and Islands and action is long overdue.

The debate is welcome because it draws attention to the good progress that is being made. The money that has been announced by the Executive is welcome—I was tempted to stand up and simply read out as my speech all the projects that are in the pipeline. It is encouraging to know that the partnership between the Executive and local government is paying dividends for communities in the Highlands. Long may that continue.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I am obliged to all members for their co-operation in this tight session. We move now to closing speeches.

16:37

**Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD):** I am speaking from my usual place in the back row because the quality of life is much better up here and I can recommend it.

The £95 million is extremely welcome and has done a lot of good.

We talk about the famous joined-up Government and we must work in a more intelligent and joined-up way. I endorse entirely what Des McNulty said about empowering communities. There is always a risk that we push money down from the top, but we must help communities to run their own affairs.

We must get all departments joined up. For example, if the education departments in councils paid janitors for longer hours, schools could be opened up more for the community. We must

consider the influence of arts and music education in schools on the quality of life in the community—education can help.

At lunch time, some of us heard about an excellent project run by a youth café in Arbroath. People went to Germany and discovered a kind of street football, not as we have known it in the past, but a mixed activity that is not fiercely competitive and is good for young people as it socialises them.

There has been a suggestion that we could have restorative justice anti-graffiti groups that, in co-operation and liaison with the councils, would remove graffiti and help in other ways, such as in the removal of litter and chewing gum. That would be a constructive use of justice department money.

The transport department should pay more towards the kind of bus services that help communities to have quality of life.

Other departments can help with such projects, together with direct help from Mr Kerr's department.

Although it is good to fund local authorities—they make choices about how they distribute their money—the voluntary sector offers an alternative route throughout the country. The way in which the Executive money was distributed prevented national youth organisations from getting any of the money. Such organisations produce good schemes that they spread throughout the country via local groups. I suggest earnestly to the minister that, the next time money of that kind is distributed, a reasonable chunk—not 50 per cent—should be given to the voluntary sector, which would work through its local groups to produce additional benefits to those provided by the council.

At the moment, that does not happen. Local clubs, according to my arithmetic, got 1.4 per cent of the £95 million, youth projects got 1.4 per cent and music and the arts got 0.6 per cent. I think that those things deserve more, because quality of life covers a wide range. What we have been talking about today is important. To many people, dog fouling, litter, graffiti, fear of crime and street lighting are important, as are uneven pavements, at which many places excel. All of that is important, but there are other, wider things that benefit communities greatly, helping the communities themselves and developing everything from nurseries to senior citizens' clubs. The community is doing a lot and activities such as youth clubs, amateur football teams and amateur orchestras and drama groups are all part of quality of life. I very much hope that we can help in those areas as well as dealing with such things as graffiti.

16:41

**Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con):** Statistics prove that, even in Andy Kerr's brave new world, we are unlikely to be murdered in our beds of a night—although I say that without prejudice to some things that I may say in future. The fact of the matter is that people's lives are adversely affected by a number of the problems that have been raised in this afternoon's debate, including litter, dog fouling and vandalism. Not only do those things detract from people's lives and impinge on their enjoyment of their property, but in some areas—particularly in our inner cities—they are a very real problem.

It is all very well throwing money at those problems, as Mr Kerr said, but the enforcement action that is necessary provokes some degree of difficulty. In his contribution to the debate, Mr Kerr mentioned the issues that would arise over the application of fixed penalties for the dropping of litter, and he was correct to do so. One could imagine that any cleansing operative approaching a citizen of Glasgow who had just dropped a cigarette packet would receive a fairly short answer of two words, the second of which would be "off". Such situations could become confrontational and there could be a degree of violence. I cannot see how the fixed-penalty thinking is likely to produce results at the end of the day. Those dropping litter and those fly-tipping should be prosecuted through the courts. The Executive has manifestly failed to provide the resources to the Crown Office and to the prosecution service generally, so fiscals will not proceed with charges that they regard as de minimis. That is something that must be looked at.

Vandalism is a real problem. We see it time and again and Bruce Crawford, who has now left the chamber, was quite right to highlight how both litter and vandalism detract greatly from the amenity of our cities and act as a major turn-off to visitors. In Scotland, and particularly in the cities of Glasgow and Edinburgh, we must attract foreign visitors and foreign money. Many people are put off by the fact that the streets of our cities are festooned with litter, graffiti and all the other detritus of anti-social behaviour, so we must do something. I suggest to the Minister for Finance and Public Services and to the Deputy Minister for Justice, who is sitting behind him, that the children's hearings system, as it is presently constituted, is not likely to act as much of a deterrent to those who are carrying out acts of vandalism.

Much has been made of the problem of fireworks. Fireworks used to be a nuisance, but they are now becoming a positive menace. I was very pleased indeed and encouraged by much of what Mr Kerr had to say in that respect, because

fireworks are dangerous. They are dangerous to those who use them and they are becoming ever more dangerous to those who simply do not wish to have anything whatever to do with them. I suggest—and I say this in full recognition of the tremendous amount of work that John Young and Shona Robison have done—that there is a way of dealing with the problem other than legislating or licensing. The misuse of fireworks is, quite clearly, a breach of the peace. In certain instances, there could be reckless conduct. The existing law is perfectly adequate to deal with that particular nuisance.

Many things can be mentioned during the debate and there are many ways in which the quality of life can be improved. For example, we could ensure that burglar alarms do not go on for hours and that car alarms receive appropriate attention—but it is essential that major problems such as vandalism receive the attention that they deserve.

16:45

**Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP):** Nobody denies that people want litter, graffiti, dogs' dirt and so on sorted out, but that is local government's job. It would be helpful if legislative changes and updates could be provided in respect of powers of licences and penalties, but are we seriously saying that this is the stuff that makes for the McConnell Administration's flagship legislation? That was what the First Minister claimed. When no progress can be seen—

**Iain Smith:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Fiona Hyslop:** I am sorry, but I have just started—I have obviously touched a raw nerve.

I am not sure whether the Executive has moved on since the May and August announcements. I noticed that the ministers nodded strongly at Shona Robison's comments. I am aware that ministers cannot make announcements during closing speeches, but I had hoped that we would hear something on fireworks legislation in particular during the opening speech. I am disappointed that we did not. I hope that there will be progress.

I am concerned that the Executive is not selling Scotland abroad on the big-picture horizon in respect of making our way in the world and that it undersells the Parliament at home by trumpeting basic housekeeping, commonsense ideas as the best things since sliced bread, but does not come up with the legislative goods. It makes a virtue of dealing with the symptoms of decline—it should be remembered that Tony Blair adopted the Tory spending plans for public services for the first few years—but does not get on with the real job of

growing Scotland's economy, increasing the public purse for local government and establishing basic policies and legislative proposals in time.

The Labour-Liberal coalition likes to deal with symptoms and incremental change—otherwise it might have to come up with some big ideas. There is absolutely nothing wrong with the legislative proposals so far, apart from the fact that they have come not from the Executive, but from individual MSPs. I note Bruce Crawford's criticism that a consultation by the Executive and proposals for legislation could be the kiss of death for members' proposals. I am not necessarily saying that the minister is responsible for that—the Parliament might be—but we must be aware of the danger. Local government will and should deliver on such issues and services.

Local government needs two things from the Executive—finance and the powers to do its job properly while we get on with ours. On finance, there is a problem in that COSLA has said that local authorities have been under-resourced for core services to the tune of £440 million over the past few years. On what Iain Smith said, I have a quotation from the *Official Report*. Councillor Pentland said:

“Over the three years, we identified an overall funding gap of some £440 million.”—[*Official Report, Local Government Committee*, 29 October 2002; c 3337.]

**Iain Smith** *rose*—

**Mr Kerr** *rose*—

**Fiona Hyslop:** I will take an intervention from the minister.

**Mr Kerr:** The local authorities came to me and asked whether the Scottish Executive would fully support its initiatives, fund national insurance costs, allow for pay and price inflation, abolish capital controls, reduce ring fencing and make no call on council tax increases. That is what we delivered for local government. I want to clarify what the SNP is saying. I do not think that this will happen, but if, in a mythical future, local government walked in the door for negotiations with an SNP Government and its finance minister, would local government simply name a number and would the SNP simply pay the cash?

**Fiona Hyslop:** We have transparency and negotiation, absolutely. The issue is that COSLA still disagrees with the proposals. If it has not had investment in core services until now, it is no wonder that in West Lothian, for example, a £13.50 bulky uplift charge has been imposed and there are complaints that fly-tipping has increased. The issue is about basic services and basic financial proposals.

I have a simple point to make about powers. The McIntosh report was debated in the chamber on 2



July 1999. The proposals were great, but there have been problems in timing and implementation. The Executive did not implement the proposals. The joint local authority-Parliament conference compact could have been up and running. I suspect that proposals for amendment of the Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982 would almost certainly have been on the table as part of that compact and we would have been well on our way to implementing proposals that have been made.

The problem is that we are not getting on with the job. Tricia Marwick suggested during a Sewel debate—I think that it was on guide dogs for the blind—as far back as seven months ago, long before Jack McConnell's initial announcement, that we should have a civic government bill proposal to deal with all the individual proposals that were on the table. We could have had the basic housekeeping legislation, had we had the proposals, the finance and the powers. That is the problem. The local authorities needed that and that is what the Parliament could have provided. That is what the Executive should have been doing but it has not done so. This is not a council chamber. This is not a parish council. This is Scotland's Parliament. Duncan McNeil made a sincere speech about the needs of local communities. The problem is that it could easily have been made in Inverclyde Council.

It is important that we allow local authorities to use the powers that they have and that we use the powers that we have to legislate. The most important thing is to get on with the job. Let us see some action on legislation.

16:51

**The Deputy Minister for Finance and Public Services (Peter Peacock):** For the most part the debate has been very useful. It highlights the range of issues that exist and the range of actions that are taking place throughout Scotland that we believe significantly improve the quality of life for all our people and improve the communities that they live in.

In his opening speech, Andy Kerr gave excellent examples—as have members throughout the debate—of what councils have managed to do in the short time since we allocated the £95 million to them during the summer to help with the action that we want. There is action throughout Scotland. There is improved street safety through better street lighting and closed-circuit television schemes. Action is being taken to make our roads and pavements much safer than they have been. Safer routes to schools are being encouraged through traffic-calming measures of the sort that Dorothy-Grace Elder called for and through walking buses. Litter has been cleared up, graffiti cleaned up and derelict cars removed. More

opportunities are being provided for our young people by providing free swimming lessons and refurbishing play areas and the like, to name but a few.

Many members have highlighted issues that affect their constituencies and the actions that are flowing from the Executive's programme as a result of the effort that we are putting into improving the quality of life.

Iain Smith talked about the improvements in Fife, where about £6.25 million has been allocated in this year to make progress, only £500,000 of which is going into matters such as street lighting and safety improvements.

Des McNulty raised a number of interesting points about the administration of the scheme, which Donald Gorrie associated himself with, and about allowing local choices to be made in such a way that they meet national priorities. Des McNulty also made some interesting points about how we could use that kind of funding and that approach to empower communities to take more ownership of their own community and improve their communities with our help and that of local authorities.

Shona Robison raised several points about fireworks, as did Bill Aitken, John Young and many other members. There will be a members' debate about fireworks next week, when we will take the opportunity to spell out further our thoughts on the matter.

John Young went slightly too far in calling for the return of chain gangs, but he made it clear that that was his personal view and not the view of the Conservative party.

As I said, Dorothy-Grace Elder made important points about the impact of motor cars on our communities. A lot of the funding that is coming through the initiative is going on traffic calming schemes and dealing with the issues that she raised. Duncan McNeil mentioned a range of issues that affect his community, such as safer streets, campaigns to improve litter collection, railings and palings, graffiti on walls and so on. All the actions that we are taking are designed to address such matters.

Maureen Macmillan gave us a long list of the things that are happening in the Highlands with the extra money that it has received. She talked about measures related to children and highlighted the importance of bus shelters on remote moors in the Highlands. She is right; that can improve the quality of life of many people.

Keith Harding is making a distinct contribution to the debate through his dog fouling bill. As he indicated and I am happy to repeat—despite what Tricia Marwick said—the Executive will support his

bill. We will indicate our detailed position on that next week when I give evidence to the Local Government Committee. I will also suggest areas where we think that we can improve the bill. I am glad to say that Keith Harding, my officials and his supporters on the bill have been working closely on those points. I encourage other members, despite what the SNP and others have said, to bring forward ideas that they have about matters on which they think we can make changes, and where we can, we will work constructively with them to take those matters forward. Having praised Keith Harding, however, I point out that he struck a critical tone with a number of his comments and his amendment reflects that.

I could make the point, as Iain Smith did, that it could be argued that the quality-of-life funding is necessary to allow us to make up the ground that was lost during those dark Tory days of the 1980s and 1990s. At that time, the pressure of the huge cuts that were imposed made local authorities, which were struggling to maintain front-line services, squeeze the areas that we are trying to boost expenditure in now. The Executive is taking action to restore that level of expenditure and move forward from that. It is perhaps because of the actions of the Tories in those bygone days that we have virtually no Tory councillors in Scotland and no Tory councils.

Keith Harding and others rightly referred to the problems that certain groups of young people can cause in their communities. However, far from helping with those problems, the Tories' indications yesterday about dumping kids out of the education system would only accentuate those problems, not address them. However, our set of proposals for dealing with those problems in communities is comprehensive. The issue is not only about dealing with offending; it is about working with young people through the sure start Scotland programme, providing pre-school education and classroom assistants, improving attainment in our schools, opening new community schools, putting more money into youth work, supporting community safety partnerships, getting more community-based programmes of the sort that Donald Gorrie called for into our communities to allow disposals from the courts and the children's panel and supporting sport and culture more effectively. We are examining all of those areas as well as dealing with the offending by examining new mechanisms such as youth courts. The Tories' approach, in contrast, has a narrow focus on punishment.

Before we came into the chamber, Andy Kerr and I discussed whether the SNP could rise to the debate today. I have to say that it has failed yet again, with another ungracious display of the classic approach that we see in virtually every debate in the chamber: some momentary

acceptance that something good might be happening, followed by a succession of moans designed to detract attention from the excellent work that the Executive is doing. Watching the SNP members is like watching a huge depression moving in from the Atlantic. They are the Private Frazers of Scottish politics, crying, "We're all doomed."

However, I tell the chamber that few of the SNP councils—and there are few of them anyway—were gloomy when the quality-of-life initiative was announced. They welcomed it with open arms. In Angus, the £140,000 that is being invested in a youth diversion initiative is possible only because the Scottish Executive took that action. The same is true of the free swimming lessons for children in Falkirk and the healthy-eating initiative in Clackmannanshire schools.

The SNP amendment is misplaced. SNP members moan about funding for core services at the very time that record sums of money are going into our councils for those services and councils are receiving more cash than they have ever received from central Government. We are giving councils money for the priorities that councils sought new funding for. They are moaning on the day on which Margaret Curran made a significant housing announcement, bringing in a prudential regime for housing that local authorities have asked for for many years and removing the 25 per cent-75 per cent capital receipt set-aside rule that was a burden in the past.

**Fiona Hyslop:** Will the minister give way?

**Peter Peacock:** I am close to the limit of my time.

SNP members moan while local government's share of the budget is maintained, despite the biggest increases in health spending in history, which will improve the quality of life of all Scots. They moan while we fund concessionary fares, improving the quality of life of our older citizens. They moan while we have the biggest expansion of rural transport services that we have ever had in Scotland, which is improving the quality of life of our rural dwellers. They moan while we ensure that we have record numbers of police on our streets and falling crime rates, which improves the quality of life of all our citizens. They moan while more resources than ever are being invested in our schools and young people experience better-quality education. They moan when we have low inflation, low unemployment and a growing economy, which improves the quality of life of thousands of Scots.

While the SNP moans about all that, we will get on with the job of improving the quality of life of Scots through better health, improved education, reduced crime, better transport links, more

economic opportunities for our people and the specific quality-of-life initiatives that we have been discussing today. Throughout Scotland, every Government programme is improving the quality of life of Scots. I commend the motion to Parliament.

**Fiona Hyslop:** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My understanding is that ministers should clarify to the chamber if they make statements that are not quite true. I ask the minister to clarify the statement that he made about the set-aside rules. Did the Minister for Social Justice say this morning that they would be abolished, as the minister said, or did he say, as in the Minister for Social Justice's statement, that they would be looked at, as opposed to abolished?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That is not a matter for me to rule on and it is not a matter for the minister in the context of the debate, but the point is made.

## Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:01

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr Murray Tosh):** I ask Euan Robson to move motion S1M-3550, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, motion S1M-3551, on the designation of a lead committee, and motion S1M-3552, on the membership of committees.

*Motions moved,*

That the Parliament agrees that the Codes of Recommendations for the Welfare of Livestock: Animal Health and Biosecurity (SE/2002/273) be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Local Government Committee be designated as lead committee in consideration of the Prostitution Tolerance Zones (Scotland) Bill and that the Justice 1 and Justice 2 Committees be secondary committees.

That the Parliament agrees that Bruce Crawford be appointed to replace Adam Ingram on the Transport and the Environment Committee.—[*Euan Robson.*]

## Decision Time

17:02

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr Murray Tosh):** There are nine questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that amendment S1M-3541.2, in the name of Fergus Ewing, which seeks to amend motion S1M-3541, in the name of Allan Wilson, on forestry in Scotland, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

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

### FOR

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Campbell, Colin (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)  
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)  
 Davidson, Mr David (North-East Scotland) (Con)  
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)  
 Elder, Dorothy-Grace (Glasgow) (Ind)  
 Ewing, Dr Winnie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Fergusson, Alex (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Gibson, Mr Kenneth (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Harding, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Grn)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)  
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Johnstone, Alex (North-East Scotland) (Con)  
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)  
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 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)  
 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)  
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)  
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)  
 Wallace, Ben (North-East Scotland) (Con)  
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)  
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Wilson, Andrew (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Young, John (West of Scotland) (Con)

### AGAINST

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)

Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)  
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)  
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)  
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)  
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)  
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)  
 Fitzpatrick, Brian (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)  
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)  
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)  
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Gray, Iain (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Lab)  
 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)  
 Jenkins, Ian (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)  
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (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)  
 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)  
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)  
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Ochil) (Lab)  
 Smith, Iain (North-East Fife) (LD)  
 Smith, Mrs Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)  
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)  
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)  
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)  
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)  
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 44, Against 58, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The second question is, that amendment S1M-3541.1, in the name of Alex Fergusson, which seeks to amend motion S1M-3541, in the name of Allan Wilson, on forestry in Scotland, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

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

**FOR**

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

**AGAINST**

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)  
 Campbell, Colin (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)  
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)  
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)  
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)  
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)  
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)  
 Elder, Dorothy-Grace (Glasgow) (Ind)  
 Ewing, Dr Winnie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)  
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)  
 Fitzpatrick, Brian (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)  
 Gibson, Mr Kenneth (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)  
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)  
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)  
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Gray, Iain (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Lab)  
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)  
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)  
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)  
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)  
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)  
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)  
 Jenkins, Ian (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)  
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)  
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)  
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)  
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)  
 MacKay, Angus (Edinburgh South) (Lab)  
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)  
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)  
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 McAllion, Mr John (Dundee East) (Lab)  
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)

McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)  
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)  
 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)  
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)  
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)  
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)  
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)  
 Paterson, Mr Gil (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Quinan, Mr Lloyd (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Reid, Mr George (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)  
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)  
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Ochil) (Lab)  
 Smith, Iain (North-East Fife) (LD)  
 Smith, Mrs Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)  
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)  
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)  
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)  
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)  
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)  
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)  
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)  
 Wilson, Andrew (Central Scotland) (SNP)

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 17, Against 86, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that motion S1M-3541, in the name of Allan Wilson, on forestry in Scotland, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

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

**FOR**

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)  
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)  
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)  
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)  
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)  
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)  
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)  
 Fitzpatrick, Brian (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)  
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)  
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)  
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Gray, Iain (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Lab)

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)  
 Jenkins, Ian (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)  
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (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)  
 McMahan, Mr Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)  
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)  
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)  
 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)  
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)  
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Ochil) (Lab)  
 Smith, Iain (North-East Fife) (LD)  
 Smith, Mrs Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)  
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)  
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)  
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)  
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)  
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

#### AGAINST

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Campbell, Colin (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)  
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)  
 Davidson, Mr David (North-East Scotland) (Con)  
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)  
 Ewing, Dr Winnie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Fergusson, Alex (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Gibson, Mr Kenneth (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 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)  
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)  
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 McIntosh, Mrs Lyndsay (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 McLeod, Fiona (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 McLetchie, David (Lothians) (Con)  
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

Morgan, Alasdair (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP)  
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 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)  
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)  
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)  
 Wallace, Ben (North-East Scotland) (Con)  
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)  
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Wilson, Andrew (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Young, John (West of Scotland) (Con)

#### ABSTENTIONS

Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Grn)

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 58, Against 43, Abstentions 1.

#### *Motion agreed to.*

That the Parliament notes the report of the Interdepartmental Review Group on Forestry; welcomes the proposed changes to the administrative arrangements for forestry in Scotland contained in that report; notes the proposals by an industry wide steering group for a new Scottish Forestry Grants Scheme, and believes these changes will help achieve the objectives set out in the Scottish Forestry Strategy.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that amendment S1M-3543.1, in the name of Tricia Marwick, which seeks to amend motion S1M-3543, in the name of Andy Kerr, on quality of life, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

#### **Members: No.**

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

#### FOR

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Campbell, Colin (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)  
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)  
 Davidson, Mr David (North-East Scotland) (Con)  
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)  
 Ewing, Dr Winnie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Fergusson, Alex (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Gibson, Mr Kenneth (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 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)  
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)  
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 McIntosh, Mrs Lyndsay (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 McLeod, Fiona (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 McLetchie, David (Lothians) (Con)  
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

Morgan, Alasdair (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP)  
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 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)  
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)  
 Wallace, Ben (North-East Scotland) (Con)  
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)  
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Wilson, Andrew (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Young, John (West of Scotland) (Con)

#### AGAINST

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)  
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)  
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)  
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)  
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)  
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)  
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)  
 Fitzpatrick, Brian (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)  
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)  
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)  
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Gray, Iain (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Lab)  
 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)  
 Jenkins, Ian (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)  
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (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)  
 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)  
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)  
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Ochil) (Lab)  
 Smith, Iain (North-East Fife) (LD)  
 Smith, Mrs Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)

Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)  
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)  
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)  
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)  
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

#### ABSTENTIONS

Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Grn)  
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 42, Against 58, Abstentions 2.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that amendment S1M-3543.2, in the name of Keith Harding, which seeks to amend motion S1M-3543, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

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

#### FOR

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

#### AGAINST

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)  
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)  
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)  
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)  
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)  
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)  
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)  
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)  
 Fitzpatrick, Brian (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)  
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)  
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)  
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Gray, Iain (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Lab)  
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Grn)  
 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)

Jenkins, Ian (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)  
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (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)  
 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)  
 Quinan, Mr Lloyd (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)  
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)  
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Ochil) (Lab)  
 Smith, Iain (North-East Fife) (LD)  
 Smith, Mrs Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)  
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)  
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)  
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)  
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)  
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

#### ABSTENTIONS

Campbell, Colin (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Dr Winnie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Mr Kenneth (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)  
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)  
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 McLeod, Fiona (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Morgan, Alasdair (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP)  
 Paterson, Mr Gil (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Reid, Mr George (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)  
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)  
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Wilson, Andrew (Central Scotland) (SNP)

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 16, Against 62, Abstentions 24.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that motion S1M-3543, in the name of

Andy Kerr, on quality of life, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** Yes.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I think that we are all agreed. That took me by surprise.

*Motion agreed to.*

That the Parliament supports the work of the Scottish Executive, the all-party group on quality of life, local authorities and other stakeholders to improve the quality of life in Scotland's communities, notably the allocation to local authorities of £95 million this year and a further £180 million for the next three years to improve the local environment and the quality of people's daily lives.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that motion S1M-3550, in the name of Patricia Ferguson, on the approval of a statutory instrument, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to.*

That the Parliament agrees that the Codes of Recommendations for the Welfare of Livestock: Animal Health and Biosecurity (SE/2002/273) be approved.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that motion S1M-3551, in the name of Patricia Ferguson, on the designation of a lead committee, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to.*

That the Parliament agrees that the Local Government Committee be designated as lead committee in consideration of the Prostitution Tolerance Zones (Scotland) Bill and that the Justice 1 and Justice 2 Committees be secondary committees.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that motion S1M-3552, in the name of Patricia Ferguson, on the membership of a committee, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to.*

That the Parliament agrees that Bruce Crawford be appointed to replace Adam Ingram on the Transport and the Environment Committee.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That concludes decision time. I invite those members who are leaving the chamber before members' business to do so quietly and quickly.



## Seagulls (Nuisance to Communities)

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid):** The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S1M-3499, in the name of David Mundell, on nuisance caused by seagulls.

*Motion debated,*

That the Parliament notes that seagulls are causing an increasing nuisance in communities across Scotland and believes that the Scottish Executive should develop best practice guidance on how to tackle the problems associated with seagulls.

17:09

**David Mundell (South of Scotland) (Con):** It is apposite that this debate on how to tackle the nuisance caused by gulls in urban areas should follow a debate on quality of life, which has confirmed the importance that the Scottish Government places on tackling issues such as dog fouling, litter and graffiti.

Although some in the chattering classes poke fun at and sneeringly dismiss the issue, I can assure members that, to those who are faced with the consequences of gulls nesting and roosting in their communities, the matter is a serious one. Gulls are disruptive to the community and their presence is positively alarming for individuals when so-called dive-bombing occurs, which happens when the young are in the nest.

The minister is already aware that gull nuisance is a serious issue in Dumfries. It has prompted Dumfries and Galloway Council to set up a gull focus group, including councillors and officials, which took views from the public. The council has commissioned a number of detailed reports on the gull population in and around Dumfries. It has published a leaflet on the control of roof-nesting gulls. Despite that activity, the council's latest report shows a 9 per cent increase in the gull population overall and a more worrying 32 per cent increase in the population in areas on the outskirts of the town.

A number of options, both lethal and non-lethal, for dealing with gulls are available. The purpose of today's debate is to encourage the Scottish Executive to introduce further best practice guidelines that reflect how the issue has been dealt with effectively across Scotland and elsewhere in the United Kingdom or Europe, instead of requiring individual authorities such as Dumfries and Galloway Council to reinvent the wheel and to deal with the problem themselves. In my view, there is a need to clarify the law. In its submission, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds indicates that it would welcome more guidance clarifying the legal status of wild gulls.

The difficulties that arise with gulls are well documented. The J C environmental consultancy 2001 report on Dumfries makes it clear that the density of gulls in the centre of the town is now sufficiently high to cause considerable fouling of the streets. Many vertical walls of buildings in the town centre are heavily streaked with gull droppings. That, along with the very presence of the birds, makes the town centre much less attractive.

There are also noise problems, especially when gulls are roosting or nesting on roofs of individual homes. The RSPB is right to point out that calls are a natural part of the breeding behaviour of the species, but to the affected householders the noise of gulls calling can be a nightmare.

Another problem is that of birds swooping and so-called dive-bombing. That occurs primarily during the nesting season, especially if chicks fall from the nest. The concept of swooping may amuse some people, but it causes panic in elderly people and is extremely frightening. I know of people who felt unable to leave their homes when the activity was taking place.

Gulls also damage roofs by picking at roof materials. They are responsible for blocking drains, flues and gutters.

A wide range of measures has been taken to remedy the situation and to establish exactly why the birds are in Dumfries in the first place. For a long time it was thought that the presence of gulls in Dumfries town centre was a direct consequence of the town's proximity to the Locharmoss waste disposal landfill site. However, research has indicated that the gulls that use the waste disposal site are younger birds that fly to it directly from the coast and do not inhabit the town centre.

Food is a key reason for the gulls' presence in Dumfries and other communities. It is incredible that some individuals continue to feed the gulls in the streets of Dumfries and other towns. However, the unintentional feeding that comes from littering—especially the disposal of half-eaten takeaways and other foodstuffs—is clearly a significant attraction to gulls. Another problem is the disposal of waste from commercial premises, particularly those that sell food. It is ridiculous that such premises still put waste into the street in plastic bin bags that gulls can easily peck through. I will be interested to hear how the national and local waste disposal strategy to which the minister referred in response to a question that I asked last week will ensure an end to bin bags containing discarded foodstuffs in our streets, which could significantly reduce the lure of town centres for gulls.

A large number of nests are built on flat roofs of commercial properties. Although gull-proofing

roofs is to be encouraged, particularly on significant sites, a concerning finding of the 2001 report on Dumfries town centre was that a large number of gulls whose original sites had been disrupted by maintenance work had moved to other sites. It is interesting to note that, when a scheme was operated in Eyemouth that provided grants for gull-proofing roofs, there was a disappointingly poor take-up by property owners.

As I have indicated, many aspects of the debate can seem somewhat surreal. I was not aware—and the minister might not be aware—that gulls are regular clubbers. Large numbers of young potentially breeding birds gather together to find breeding partners. Those clubs act as a centre of attraction for gulls. The vast group at the Safeway store in Dumfries regularly comprises 60 to 120 birds. Although the nests have been removed successfully from the Safeway roof, the club continues to meet. Simply removing the nest or operating anti-nesting measures is not sufficient and efforts have to be made to disrupt breeding activities so that young birds move elsewhere to breed and the number of nesting gulls in our towns is reduced.

The disruption of breeding activities is only one measure to be taken. I commend Dumfries and Galloway Council for the range of measures that it has tried over the years, from using plastic hawks and real hawks to removing nests and disrupting breeding colonies. The various websites of groups such as the Pigeon Control Advisory Service and the British Pest Control Association set out numerous lethal methodologies, such as shooting, and non-lethal methodologies. A wide range of potential solutions emerges.

Although local authorities in Scotland have the responsibility to deal with the issue, they need clearer guidance on what solutions are available, in what circumstances those measures have proved to be effective and how a concerted plan of action can be carried through that does not simply move the gulls elsewhere in a community or to another community.

I seek the minister's views on the current legal position, which I understand to be that gulls can be culled only if there seem to be genuine issues of public health and safety, rather than simply of nuisance. Accordingly, I would be grateful if he would set out when nuisance crosses the line to become a public health and safety issue and in what circumstances he would envisage culling. I make it clear that I do not promote culling as the one simple solution to the problem. I look forward to the minister's response so that we can move forward and help local authorities and communities to find a solution to this long-running problem.

17:18

**Mrs Margaret Ewing (Moray) (SNP):** I congratulate David Mundell on raising the issue, because it is serious. Like him, I have noticed that our esteemed press corps has regarded the matter as a bit of a funny subject, but it is no laughing matter for many of the constituents who have contacted me to tell me about the difficulties that they have encountered.

Many people are terrified by the presence of large colonies of gulls—or gows, as we call them in our area. People do not regard them as feathered friends; they see them as a threatening menace. Anyone who has been up close to a gull will know how threatening they can appear. The problem must be particularly difficult for elderly people.

Those of us who have lived in coastal communities for years have seen the problem developing for a considerable time. I have heard a wide range of complaints from constituents who have been dive-bombed—and of course my husband was the subject of a dive-bombing while he was out doing his running training between Lossiemouth and Roseisle on a Sunday. Other people have been dive-bombed while following their normal pursuits of walking, golfing or running, all of which are important aspects of community life in Moray.

David Mundell rightly raised the issue of disturbed sleep. Our bedroom in Lossiemouth has a flat roof. During the summer months, we are regularly awakened at 4 am by the seagulls on our roof. At times, it seems as if they are practising for parts in "Riverdance", because they sound as if they are wearing tackety boots. The noise that they make is quite incredible.

That is a serious point. Hoteliers and owners of bed-and-breakfast establishments in the area have told me that tourists have said that they will not come to the area again. They love Moray, its facilities and its beauty, but they will not come back because of the noise of the seagulls and the menace that they feel is over their heads.

As I said, we have been aware of the problem developing for some time. There are two reasons for the problem. The first relates to the depleted fish stocks. The gows used to follow the boats and they ate what was discarded from the boats. Now that there are fewer and fewer boats ploughing their way through our seas, the birds are moving further inland.

The second reason relates to the arrival of wheelie bins, which deny seagulls access to human rubbish. Seagulls even go for rubbish that has been disposed of sensibly in black bags. Having chased seagulls away from my black bags at half-past 7 one rainy morning, I can tell

members that it was not a pleasant experience. My constituents probably thought that I should have been certified.

Seagulls have become urban scavengers, moving further inland all the time. What can we do? David Mundell has made several recommendations with which I agree. People must clean up their litter habits. There should be greater use of the facilities that already exist to fine people for destroying our environment by the careless discarding of rubbish, particularly foodstuffs. We should fine the litter louts a lot more than we do. Facilities exist and I think that they should be strengthened and better enforced.

Councils already have the powers to cull. However, I believe that we all want that to be done humanely. It should also be done by appropriate qualified pest control organisations. After all, if a person has a hive of wasps in their garage or house, they phone the environmental health department and it sends out someone who is qualified to deal with the problem. Why cannot we do the same with gulls?

Other suggestions have included the bird-proofing of buildings or the introduction of scaring measures. As David Mundell pointed out, there is no proof that those measures have worked.

I believe that the Scottish Executive should address the matter seriously. People are reaching the end of their tether. Individuals are not allowed to shoot gulls, but they are being driven to take such measures. Decent, law-abiding citizens feel that they have reached the stage where they must break the law. We must give better guidance to local authorities to ensure that our citizens are not placed in that position.

17:23

**Alex Johnstone (North-East Scotland) (Con):**

I congratulate David Mundell on securing tonight's debate. There is more than one way to get to the top of the list for members' business; having a common interest with the business manager is one of the better ones.

The nuisance, noise and mess associated with seagulls—primarily herring and black-backed gulls—is a real problem for everyone in the coastal communities around the north-east of Scotland. The seagull problem has been raised with me many times by constituents and by community councils in the Angus towns of Arbroath and Montrose where the problem is increasing. On a number of occasions I have raised the matter with the local authority.

The local authority has informed me that, in addition to the routine problems, a total of 11 gull attacks were reported to Angus Council in the Montrose area alone in 2001.

Although the problem is treated as a bit of a joke by those who have not experienced it, the noise, mess and threat of attack from gulls can seriously affect the quality of life of people who live and work in the affected areas. In addition to those problems, gulls can give a bad impression to visitors to a town or village. As has been mentioned, that could damage the vital tourism sector.

Up until 1995-96, Angus Council provided a free service for the removal of gulls' nests and eggs from buildings in parts of Arbroath. Although the council acknowledged that that was an effective and humane way of controlling the seagull population, the policy was ultimately discontinued for funding reasons. Since then, it appears that the gull population and the problems that are associated with it have increased.

Earlier this year, in response to local concerns, Angus Council introduced a number of new measures to tackle the problem, including signs requesting the public to refrain from feeding gulls—a major cause of the problem—in areas of particular problems. In addition, the council has published a booklet on controlling roof-nesting gulls and is considering the feasibility of proofing all council-owned property where gulls nest or roost. Aberdeen City Council has also proceeded with that proposal.

In relation to taking action against gulls, local authorities still have a number of options under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. However, best practice guidelines would be helpful and would allow the public to judge effectively the performance of their local authority in that field. I look forward to a positive response from the minister on the many problems that are associated with gulls around Scotland's coasts.

17:26

**Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green):**

Margaret Ewing referred to her husband's experience of being attacked by seagulls when he was running near Lossiemouth, where I used to love to walk. She has reminded me of an incident that occurred while I was training for the 1985 Edinburgh marathon. As I was running round Arthur's Seat against a stiff breeze, I overtook a rather bemused-looking seagull that was attempting to fly in the same direction. That was a proud moment.

Gulls are a serious problem in parts of Edinburgh. I recently attended a meeting in Bruntsfield at which the residents were up in arms about, and most distressed by, the number of gulls that nest on roofs in that part of Edinburgh. A representative from the City of Edinburgh Council told the meeting that, under present regulations, he could not do anything about the situation, as he

was not empowered to do anything about it and did not have a budget that he could use for that purpose. Letters continued to be exchanged and, thankfully, the City of Edinburgh Council changed its mind and was able to give the Bruntsfield residents some assistance in dealing with a problem that was becoming a dangerous pest. Many people who visit Edinburgh stay in bed and breakfasts in the Bruntsfield area and I am sure that they are just as fed up as the people who stay in Scotland's coastal resorts.

That example reinforces David Mundell's point about the need for our local authorities to have clarity, so that they can deal with the growing problem of gulls by allocating budgets and obtaining the best advice. I congratulate David Mundell on securing the debate.

Margaret Ewing mentioned the fishing industry. I will take a holistic view of the issue. One of the problems of the common fisheries policy has been that, during the past 20 to 30 years, our boats have been compelled to dump so many fish over the side that the gulls have virtually forgotten how to fend for themselves. They have learnt to live off offal. That might well be why, in the absence of those benefits, they have started to descend on our towns and villages and to become a pest. It might be possible to establish that scientifically.

I want to draw to the attention of the minister the design of litter bins. I recently visited somewhere further along the coast than Portobello. I noticed that, even though the beach had just been cleaned, there was litter all the way along the seafront. Gulls have worked out how to get into litter bins, pull out the chip packets and consume their contents. Guidance needs to be given to local authorities, because there are other bins that can be used. For example, I think that the bins that we have recently installed in Edinburgh are gull-proof. I certainly would not like to be a gull trying to get into them. We need guidance, and maybe even encouragement, from the Executive on the design of litter bins to make them not only gull-proof but crow-proof, because crows are becoming more prevalent in city centres.

17:30

**Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP):** Close encounters of the gull variety. In Edinburgh, just about every night, Hitchcockesque flocks darken the skies, screaming and apparently driving away flocks of the innocent little sparrows that we hardly see any more. I have no scientific evidence for that; only the experience of what I have seen with my own eyes.

In the summer, I took the boat up the Forth to Inchcolm with a friend. We got on to the island and a sign told us to beware of the gulls in the nesting

season. It was August, but the birds had not read the notice. We started to walk up the path and had gone only a short distance when a great big fella—I presume that it was a male gull, given its attitude—dived down from the sky and hit my friend on the head. It is funny when it happens to someone else. Our walk was short. We spent the rest of the time watching other people and seeing how far they could penetrate the heather up the hill. They should change the notice on Inchcolm for a start. The birds have not learned to read.

The gulls around Eyemouth are enormous. They strut their stuff. They know something that we seem not to. They are large, aggressive bully boys with two-inch beaks. They do not move over for people. If people have any wisdom they tend to circle round them.

I searched the web for a quotation about gulls, and found this:

"One of my cats had his bottom pecked by a gull recently, showing a breathtaking disregard for the conventional 'pecking order' attached to physique."

There we go. I am a cat owner. If our cats are not safe, heaven knows.

Gulls are not at fault. The little website told me that gull numbers are down, but the point is that more of them are moving into areas where people are and they are causing trouble. I will not address the fishing issue—it is about scavenging. We are to blame for aggressive gulls, because we are the dirtiest animals on the planet. If members walk up and down any city street they will see pizza cartons with bits of pizza in them. The gulls are waiting for that. Humans are the only animals that I know that litter their own homes. I presume that baby gull watches mummy and daddy gull getting tougher and develops an attitude towards people.

Prevention is better than anything else. However, in the interim, I accept what RSPB Scotland and the Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals have to say—they recognise that there is a problem—about the fact that any way of dealing with these creatures has to be humane. We must deal with them, if only to protect the odd cat.

17:33

**Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con):** I agree with Christine Grahame's comments about litter louts. Before this, we had a debate on the quality of life in Scotland. One of the things that we all have to learn is to look after our rubbish a little bit better. In particular, the people who have a tendency to empty their pockets and plastic carry-out containers onto the streets should learn that better.

In effect, gulls can be litter louts. For example, on any Sunday morning in Ayr, fast-food operators

put out many plastic bin bags. They end up in a state, because the gulls plummet into them and spread the litter, which creates a war-zone atmosphere around the town.

I make no apology for the fact that my feelings about gulls arise from my personal contacts with constituents. I congratulate David Mundell on his research on the subject. My research is based on the emotive comments that individuals have made to me. Year after year, an old lady was trapped in her home by nesting gulls and had no assistance. The babies in a young family could not be put in their prams because the family feared the gulls. Perhaps the mess on a young woman's washing line is not serious, but it affected her quality of life. Those are the effects of gulls.

The best way to deal with gulls is to try to clear their eggs at nesting time and to discourage them from breeding in urban communities. On a light-hearted note, it might be in local authorities' interest to take up the idea of which I was informed by a fairly knowledgeable fishing expert. In his younger days, he collected black-headed gulls' eggs, which found a market in Harrods. That is a new money-raising scheme for local authorities.

**Robin Harper:** Herring gulls are the main problem.

**Phil Gallie:** I accept that the herring gull is the main problem, but the black-headed gull can also be a problem and, where it is, that might be a light-hearted solution.

When I was the member of Parliament for Ayr, the old buildings there such as the tall carpetworks and other derelict buildings were tremendous breeding grounds for gulls. Local authorities had a remit to call for demolition, but that was costly and they were reluctant to go down that line. I ask the minister to take that thought on board and consider whether we can give local authorities powers and financial support to clear up some of the derelict sites in our town centres.

17:37

**Dorothy-Grace Elder (Glasgow) (Ind):** I had not intended to speak. I attended the debate to reduce my ignorance of the subject. I once lived on the coast, but that was in the days when the coast had a thriving fishing industry. Margaret Ewing hit the button: the distribution of pizza round the streets as well as the threat to the fishing industry have had an effect on gulls' habits. My daughter who lives in Aberdeen would not thank me for supporting gulls, because their squawking wakes her up too early, which was a serious problem for her when she was a student.

The debate has been a wee bit scary and like watching a rerun of Hitchcock's "The Birds". Gulls have been described as aggressive and sexually charged. They are day-and-night clubbers that can peck cats' bottoms. However, they cannot fly as fast as Robin Harper can run. In short, gulls are almost as horrible as human beings—but not quite, yet.

I plead that we remember that gulls are nature's creatures. It is our fault if they have overbred. It is our fault if our habits are so disgusting that the poor creatures have had to change their feeding habits and eat our discarded pizzas and other items that are almost too revolting to mention.

If gulls must be culled, it should be done as the SSPCA suggests, by pricking their eggs. Eggs cannot just be removed, because the gulls will go clubbing more and lay more eggs. Please cull them humanely. We should not become a Parliament of gull haters; we should see how we can make progress.

I accept that some people suffer serious nuisance. It was rather brave of David Mundell to risk our jests. I thank him for the debate, which was good for a laugh in parts.

17:39

**The Deputy Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Allan Wilson):** I join members in congratulating David Mundell on securing the debate and I thank members for attending. I think that the debate has been time well spent, despite the comments of some.

While this issue might not rank in importance with health, education and crime, it is, as members have said, a problem for a minority of our fellow citizens. Surely the Scottish Parliament should consider the interests of the minority, who also have rights.

The clear message that I am taking away from tonight's debate is that the seagull problem is very real and that it needs action. We all recognise the vital role—indeed, it is a primary role—of Scotland's local authorities in listening and responding to the needs and views of their local population in this regard.

From what has been said tonight, it is clear that many communities are concerned about the nuisance that is caused by seagulls. I know that because, although I live inland, like Margaret Ewing I represent a constituency that includes one of Scotland's most famous coastlines—the Clyde estuary. Seagulls should be a part of the attraction to locals and visitors alike but, as is the case elsewhere, they are not and we all know why.

As every member has said, the eating habits of the gulls around the Scottish coastline have

changed; they have become fast-food junkies. Dorothy-Grace Elder rightly said that it is the people of Scotland and our visitors who have made the gulls that way. I accept the point that Margaret Ewing made about the decline in the fishing industry. I am sure that that is a factor in the problem.

Many of us do not dispose of our litter appropriately. I listened to and was struck by what Robin Harper had to say. Even when people dispose of their litter properly, unless bins are gull-proof, the problem remains. The problem arises from discarded chip pokes, McDonald's cartons and so on, the contents of which have become so much a part of our staple diet that they are now part of the seagulls' diet.

We have to do more to address the problem of litter. That is the real problem; not the seagulls alone. We have heard tonight about the urban gull—the scavenger gull—that has become a problem because of those who litter our streets. If we are to address the problem, it is critical that we cut off the supply of junk food. We can do more to stop the litter being dropped in the first place, but the next stage is to ensure that litter and waste are cleared quickly from our streets. Local authorities have a duty to keep our streets free of litter.

I will respond to the point that was raised by Margaret Ewing and David Mundell. In the normal course of events, it is illegal for any bird, including seagulls, to be killed or harmed by any person. I am sure that we all agree that that is as it should be. Local authorities, however, have a statutory duty to undertake pest control where there is a threat to public health and/or safety. Local authorities have to determine the circumstances and take appropriate action, including, if necessary, the humane control of the pest.

**Dr Winnie Ewing (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):** Someone mentioned the presence of gulls in enormous numbers in the fields where pigs are in the open air, living in little huts. It seems to me that in any investigation that the minister undertakes, he should examine whether that is a health hazard to human beings.

**Allan Wilson:** I am happy to do so, although the clear evidence that I have received from the Executive's chief medical officer is that although seagulls are a nuisance, they pose no threat to the health of the population. We need, however, to examine the matter further.

The Executive has allocated massive increases in funding for local authorities to improve their waste management. More than £240 million is available in the strategic waste fund over the next three years. Because of that and in view of the additional resources that we have allocated—much of it very recently—I am happy to give Mr

Mundell and other members a commitment that the Executive will consolidate the schemes and financial provisions that were referred to by Alex Johnstone and others.

I know that there is good practice out there, but it is not everywhere. Sometimes people may not know what is being done elsewhere. That fact has become increasingly clear to me as I have examined the matter following David Mundell and other members' raising it. I hope that that funding will ease some of the difficulties that local authorities are clearly experiencing in addressing seagull nuisance and the wider problems of litter and waste management.

I do not blame the gulls. In Parliament last Thursday, when David Mundell raised the subject, I made it clear to him that I would consider the option he suggested. Having done so in the interim, I am now convinced that there are benefits in what he and others have proposed tonight. I recognise that there are no simple solutions to the problem, but measures are in place and will have an impact on seagull nuisance. I am happy to work with Scotland's local authorities and members to tackle the problem, and from tonight I shall ask officials to develop the proposition with some urgency and to consult the RSPB for its advice on how best to act.

*Meeting closed at 17:45.*

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