

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Thursday 13 November 2003

Session 2

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Scottish Parliament

Thursday 13 November 2003

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

Child Protection

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): Good morning. The first item of business this morning is a debate on motion S2M-593, in the name of Peter Peacock, on reforming child protection in Scotland, and three amendments to the motion.

09:30

The Minister for Education and Young People (Peter Peacock): I cannot imagine a more important job that we as a society do—and few things that are more difficult and complex—than keeping our children and young people safe from harm. That is as true for us in government as it is for those who deal daily with the problems of children and families. It is also true for parents, our communities and all of us in the chamber as we strive for a Scotland that provides the best possible protection for all our children.

We rightly have high expectations of all the professionals—health professionals, teachers, the police and social workers—who work with children and families often in extremely difficult and complicated circumstances and relationships. Day after day, those professionals go about that challenging work with great dedication and personal commitment, often receiving very little credit for their good work. We must ensure that those workers at the front line have the support and management that they deserve to do their jobs.

However, we cannot look to the professionals alone to deliver our ambitions for children and young people. Tragically, people who live among us abuse and neglect children, often but not always within their own home and sometimes but not always with malice aforethought. Sometimes family members, neighbours and others bring their concerns to the attention of support services, but not always. Sometimes, even when support is provided, situations will blow up that no one could reasonably have been expected to predict and harm is done.

This area of work is complex and often requires complex interagency solutions. We all share responsibility. Government ministers, councillors, health boards, chief executives and chief constables, individual policemen, social workers, teachers and the community at large have a part to play in being vigilant about the safety and well-

being of children and young people. The fact that the Minister for Health and Community Care will close the debate for the Executive reflects our cross-portfolio and Cabinet-level commitment to improvement in this area.

It is very much everyone's job to make sure that our kids are all right. However, there are times when the services that our most vulnerable children should be able to rely on for protection have failed to provide that protection. For example, the recent report on the tragic death of Caleb Ness, with its shocking conclusion that it could have been avoided, reveals severe failings. The report is a terrible indictment of failures at all levels and across all the agencies involved. That said, I am pleased that the City of Edinburgh Council has, without question, accepted the failings that arose and is urgently addressing actions to prevent any similar failings in the future.

The Caleb Ness case serves as a dreadful reminder of the possible outcome of such failures for children who fall through the net. Although we will accept the Tory amendment, which refers to that case, it would be wrong to say that the case has been the only one to have shocked us recently. Sadly, it is not isolated or unique. The deaths of Victoria Climbié and Kennedy McFarlane are further tragic examples of the failure to protect vulnerable children. We have also been shocked by the so-called "Miss X" case in the Borders, the Carla Nicole Bone case and the Danielle Reid case. Reports of some of those cases have yet to be concluded and I cannot and will not prejudge them. However, such reports have too often in the past revealed failings that we could have avoided if we had had better interagency arrangements, better quality assurance systems, better training and better support and management systems for our front-line staff.

There is absolutely no question but that services need to improve urgently. Last year, following the findings of the national audit and review of child protection, as reported in "It's everyone's job to make sure I'm alright", the First Minister and Cathy Jamieson announced a five-point action plan to reform the child protection system. The First Minister rightly gave services three years to get things right. One year on, I want to set out for Parliament the position we have reached in delivering that plan.

We said that we would give extra money to helplines, recruit a multidisciplinary team to help to deliver reform, produce a children's charter, introduce multidisciplinary inspection for child protection and commit to a three-year child protection reform programme. The Executive has provided leadership and resources to drive forward action on all those fronts.

The goal of the reform programme is to improve the protection of children at risk of neglect or abuse and to reduce the number of children who need protection. Lessons have been learned from past cases and are being acted on. There is better communication, structured and sustainable interagency co-operation and raised awareness of child protection among all professionals. Furthermore, it has been made plain that clear leadership and support must be the norm in all agencies.

The reform programme provides the direction and drive for services to get things right over three years. Making a difference for children requires all those involved to put the interests of the child first and professional barriers and departmental interests very much second. We meant what we said when we committed to the programme and we will see the process through, no matter what action we are required to take.

I am glad to say that the reform programme is making progress. The Executive is providing leadership and is developing and delivering the programme with assistance from a steering committee that comprises representatives from the public and voluntary sectors. We have established a multidisciplinary team of six people who have been seconded from the education, police, health and social work sectors. Their work is now beginning to feed through and to inform the process.

The charter for children and young people will be published soon and we have commissioned Save the Children to consult children, parents and practitioners in order to produce proposals for it. The charter will clearly set out what every child has the right to expect and will be based on what children and young people say they need when they encounter problems.

The multidisciplinary team has been in place since July and has conducted a large consultation exercise with practitioners, including managers, the voluntary sector, other representative organisations, children and families. The consultation will inform the production of national standards for child protection. Those standards will set out where we need to be, help us to judge where we are currently and allow us to plan improvements and the important design of a new and rigorous inspection process.

We are actively developing proposals for introducing a multi-agency inspection system, which will ensure that we impact on quality, build on current best practice and focus on outcomes for the child. In that respect, we need to learn a considerable amount from the good practice that already exists in our schools system and bring that more rigorously into our social work system, particularly the area of child protection.

Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP): The fact that the social work services inspectorate has to operate across agencies, departments, local authorities and health authorities might, if anything, give rise to more challenges and difficulties than is the case with Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education. That is why our amendment mentions the need to review and strengthen the SWSI's powers. Will legislation be needed to do that?

Peter Peacock: I have had discussions on that matter with officials and Euan Robson, who is leading on much of this work for me. We are considering all the provisions that will be required, including whether there is a need for legislative provision. I think that we can make significant improvements without such a legislative base, but that remains to be seen. Further legislation might be required in due course to ensure that we underpin the systems that we want with the statutory powers and force that they need.

New guidance is being developed on the role and remit of child protection committees. We have given extra resources to ChildLine. Moreover, the implementation of the Protection of Children (Scotland) Act 2003 will involve the compilation of a list of persons who are disqualified from working with children. That will provide another important tool for protecting children.

Those measures are not being introduced in isolation. We recognise that effective management and working practices are crucial in protecting children and ensuring that all children's needs are met. Two years ago, the action team report "For Scotland's children" set a clear agenda for the better co-ordination of services and support for all children and young people. I want to re-emphasise that vision to ensure that all those who come into contact with children and young people in our schools, in health centres, through voluntary and youth groups and in our communities understand our shared obligations to every child.

I am chairing a new Cabinet delivery group for children and young people, the membership of which includes the First Minister, the Deputy First Minister and relevant portfolio ministers. The group will drive forward the agenda for change across key priorities, including the improvement of service planning and delivery, joint assessment and information sharing, the development of the children's work force, and joint inspection and quality assurance. Those priorities apply across all service areas, including health, social work and education, as well as across the statutory and voluntary sector agencies.

We need people to deliver all those measures. However, of late, there has been much comment that vacancies in social work have contributed to service failure. We need more social workers, but

we should be clear that successive reports have identified as the key issue staff failures to follow agreed systems and practices. Staff throughout agencies, not just those in social work departments, are involved. That said, we recognise the need to bring more people into social work to develop greater capacity and we are tackling that issue head on.

Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP): Will the minister categorically agree that standards and regulations can be delivered only if the staffing complement is reached? The problem is the understaffing in social work and the other contributing services.

Peter Peacock: I do not seek to duck the fact that we need more social workers and I will set out the steps that we are taking to try to achieve that. However, we have found that, notwithstanding the number of social workers, systems have failed because people have not spoken to one another or shared information effectively. In addition to the recruitment of more social work staff, that issue is at the heart of how we can make improvements.

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): The issue is not only about the quantity of social workers, but about their quality. Figures on the social work services inspectorate's website show that the specific grant for training in 1999-2000 was £3.7 million, but that this year it is £2.2 million. To assist social workers in what is an increasingly difficult profession, surely we should spend more money on training them.

Peter Peacock: As I will explain, we are doing that. Scotland now has more social workers than ever before—the number of students who qualified this year increased by 25 per cent—but the problem is that demand is increasing faster than supply. We have introduced a range of measures to address that problem and to improve the reputation, self-confidence and status of social work as part of the way of bringing more people into the profession.

Those measures include a recruitment campaign; a new honours degree, which will be supported by financial incentives of up to £9,000 for social workers who enter key areas such as child protection; the extension of our fast-track scheme for social work trainees; the establishment of a national work force group under the Deputy Minister for Education and Young People's chairmanship to develop a long-term strategy for the sector; the launch of the Scottish institute for excellence in social work education to improve standards; and—to touch on Christine Grahame's point—the provision of an additional £9 million in the next three years to local authorities and their partners for training opportunities and a further £2 million for a leadership programme.

Substantial progress is being made on social work shortages, but we will continue to review what is being done to ensure that the number of well-trained social workers is sufficient to meet current and projected needs.

Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con): Does the minister agree that the merger of social work and health care budgets would help to lessen social workers' load and to increase communication between agencies?

Peter Peacock: As I said, we are trying to take action on all fronts, including the supply of additional resources to the sectors involved. We are also increasing investment in specific initiatives. The changing children's services fund will double from £33 million this year to £65 million in 2005-06 and sure start provision will more than double from £23 million this year to £50 million in 2005-06. Those initiatives will contribute to sustained reform.

We are most of the way through the first year of the reform programme and a strong start has been made, but we have only two years left to get it absolutely right. Last week, the Cabinet took stock of progress and agreed that we must take further action to signal clearly the necessity for us all to continue to make progress on the agenda. We agreed additional key actions to do just that.

First, the Minister for Justice, the Minister for Health and Community Care and I have written to leaders in local authorities, health authorities and the police to ask them to provide a statement of assurance that they have reviewed current child protection operations, singly and collectively. We have also asked them to say whether they are satisfied with the performance of services—and, if not, whether they have put in place plans to address identified weaknesses—and to ensure that robust quality assurance procedures are in place as a basis for allowing intervention and improvement as cases develop. That action recognises that change and improvement on the ground requires the clear, consistent and continued attention of the top leaders in all agencies.

Secondly, we will accelerate the development or the introduction of multi-agency inspection. We will pilot new approaches in the next two years rather than wait until the end of the three-year programme. The children's charter and national standards will provide the context for that development, in which the focus of inspection will be on outcomes for the child.

Thirdly, I will ask the Scottish Social Services Council to ensure that regular training in child protection for all social workers is part of its registration process. We will also consider how we can ensure that on-going training on child

protection is embedded for other professionals. We have agreed that, in the new year, there should be another high-level summit of key professionals to bring together the leaders and managers of child protection services in the statutory and voluntary sectors, representative bodies and council leaders. The summit will aim to reaffirm those groups' commitment to progress and to championing change in child protection and it will review progress and agree future actions that we need to make collectively.

Our task is challenging, but its importance for the health and welfare of our most vulnerable children and young people should not be underestimated. Continued commitment, challenge, review and reform is required from people at all levels, in all agencies and in all parts of government. We will not hesitate to take the steps that we think are necessary to act on the agenda. We are making progress, but there is much more to do to keep children and young people safe from harm and neglect. When I opened the debate, I said that few things that society, Government, local government, agencies and the staff of those agencies do are more important than protecting our children from harm. I am totally committed to that task.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees that keeping Scotland's children and young people safe from harm and neglect must be a priority for all; agrees the importance of having a sustainable programme of reform of child protection services; notes the progress on the three-year child protection reform programme and future plans, and supports the Scottish Executive's decision to require local authorities, NHS boards and the police to review their practices in respect of child protection, take action where there are weaknesses, ensure that there are robust quality assurance processes in place and continue with initiatives to ensure that there are sufficient and well-trained social workers to meet current and projected needs.

09:46

Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP): This most serious of debates is cast at a time and in a climate in which we reflect on the publication of the Caleb Ness inquiry report and the progress of the child protection review that was set up following the death of Kennedy McFarlane. A number of statistics will be quoted in the debate, but we must remember that behind those statistics are individual children with a name who often live in sad, uncertain and cruel worlds.

Government cannot solve every problem of every child, but it can ensure that our support and intervention systems proactively try to prevent vulnerable children's hurt, despair and fear. My concern is that, for various reasons—many of which are noted in the published reviews—Scotland's disjointed way of working has not

served children well. The system concentrates on crisis intervention rather than on preventing the crisis in the first place. The Scottish National Party's amendment focuses on the need to increase the pace and range of recruitment.

I welcome and acknowledge the Executive's initiatives for social work recruitment. However, as recently as yesterday, the City of Edinburgh Council announced that, in the wake of the Caleb Ness report, it will spend £220,000 on clerical staff to support social workers. Our amendment acknowledges that the issue is wider than simply recruiting social workers and notes that the issues of child care and protection workers and the wider support system must be addressed. For example, the Caleb Ness inquiry report did not point to a shortage of social workers as the key problem in that case; it pointed to the lack of sharing of information, among many other factors.

It is of serious concern that the report "It's everyone's job to make sure I'm alright" found that effective service delivery is often a result of extraordinary efforts by individuals, sometimes despite—not because of—system structures. Professionals in the field are working hard to bring Scotland's children safety, security and a chance to develop, but it is surely politicians' responsibility to ensure that those professionals have the support that they need to continue their work and to develop new and innovative ways of working. If those professionals can deliver services as a result of their extraordinary efforts and despite the inertia of the system in which they work, imagine how much better they could work to deliver proper support and assistance within a system that helped rather than hindered. With such a system, the service would be more efficient and effective and there would be far less chance of tragedies that resulted from insufficiencies in service provision.

Holistic and constant examination of the delivery of children's services throughout the country is required. I welcome the recommendation that reviews should be on-going after the end of the present three-year period. I also welcome the child protection initiatives that were announced in February and I look forward to the publication of the children's charter. I acknowledge the increase in the budget line for social work training in the minister's portfolio, but I notice that that will be capped after two years. We need a constant increase, not least because the age profile of social workers means that a large number of them will retire in the coming decade. I suggest that there is a strong argument for increasing the training budget.

I believe that every politician in Scotland has a responsibility to advance the services that are provided to children. One of the marks of decency

in a society is how its children are protected and encouraged. I want us to go further than the motion suggests in respect of the requirement to review practices. I believe that every public body should be examining how it interacts with children for the purposes of safety and well-being.

Interestingly, the Caleb Ness inquiry threw up the problem of drug abuse. There has been a huge increase in the number of children who are referred to children's panels because their parents have drug-abuse problems. The figures from the Edinburgh children's panel show that the increase in referrals is not because of a greater incidence of criminal activity by young people. The big increase in referrals comes from children who need protection and the biggest reason for that is neglect from parents. That must be addressed. The scale of the increase in the number of children concerned is quite staggering. A 13 per cent increase over one year is a call to us all, and certainly to those who provide the relevant services.

It is vital that we have a sufficiency of well-trained social workers to meet projected needs. The Government's "For Scotland's children" report outlined the problem around the number of qualified social workers. It noted that a large number of social workers were leaving local authority work to take up employment in the voluntary sector, where working conditions are perhaps deemed to be better. The retention of social workers in local authority employment needs to be addressed.

There is no shortage of people wanting to become social workers or to work in child protection, but they often have trouble finding places. If we increased the provision of child care and child protection workers, particularly those working with less vulnerable children, we would release the more experienced social workers to deal with the young people who are at most risk. However, I do not think that the responsibility for ensuring that there is a sufficiency of social workers falls entirely on the heads of local authorities, health boards and the police, as the motion appears to suggest. That is why the SNP's amendment calls on the Parliament to ensure that the Executive "acknowledges its own role".

The Government cannot be responsible for the demand for child protection that is caused by negligent parents. However, it has not only key control over the supply of social workers' training and budgets, but a key influence over the demand for social workers. Feedback from the front line over recent weeks shows that, although there is an increasing number of social workers—I acknowledge the minister's figures on that—the Executive's initiatives on social work, of which we are told there have been 50 since the Executive

came to power, have themselves created more demand. That is probably why, despite the increase in recruitment, there has been an increase in the number of vacancies of more than 30 per cent in recent years. The Executive can provide a supply of social workers, but it can also create excessive demands. Those demands and the initiatives taken to meet them may be right, but the problem is continuing.

The SNP amendment calls on the Executive

"to review the role and powers of the Social Work Services Inspectorate".

That comes back to the core issue of responsibility. A blame culture, where people have their backs against the wall and where the system is used to protect individuals and to ensure that people are covered in case there is a problem, is not the climate in which to run services for vulnerable children. It is not blame that is needed; it is responsibility. They are not the same thing. What we want, what the public want and what children need is a system of responsibility—for someone to take responsibility. That was behind the publication "It's everyone's job to make sure I'm alright". I am happy to make a judgment on that following the review of the social work services inspectorate, which, I understand from the minister's comments, is probably being conducted as we speak. We need to know that we have sufficient legislative powers to ensure that every relevant authority is taking responsibility for protecting children in a meaningful, practical, cross-agency way.

On public responsibility, I am sure that we have all been contacted by Children 1st on its proposal to set up some kind of helpline for the public. I would prefer to see more details, but I would be interested if the minister, in summing up, could respond to that suggestion for a helpline to give easy access to the public to report concerns.

Scott Barrie (Dunfermline West) (Lab): The need for the public to come forward and report things at the time that they happen is an important part of the child protection process, but does the member agree that we have to encourage people to stick to what they said when reporting something? In the past, people have often known that something was not right and have wanted to report it, but they have not wanted to get too involved and have hoped that somebody else would take on the matter once they had reported it. We live in a climate where facts must be established in a court or at a hearing, so does the member agree that it is important for people to understand that?

Fiona Hyslop: I acknowledge that point and agree that we need to examine the matter more closely. The issue comes back to responsibility.

The public have to take responsibility not just for initial referrals but for the situation thereafter. We might also consider the French example—the green, or numéro vert, phone line. I would be interested to hear the minister's response on that point.

We know that there is a Scotland-wide problem with the provision of social workers. The statistics that the Executive published last week show that there has been a 33 per cent increase in the number of vacancies in children's social care. More posts lie vacant than was the case previously, although there may be more social workers in the system. Almost one in eight children's social care posts in Edinburgh is unfilled and there are 265 vacancies in Glasgow.

In Highland Council, in the area for which the Minister for Education and Young People is a list MSP, there has been a 106 per cent increase in the number of vacancies over two years. In Shetland, the number of vacancies has doubled; in Orkney, it has increased by 200 per cent. Over the same period, there has been an increase in the number of children on child protection registers. Despite the fact that 13 per cent more children are registered as being at risk, there are far more vacancies in social care services.

Although the Government is moving in the right direction, the tide might be moving faster than the Executive's response. There are shortages in relation to the services that are needed to protect those children. Statistics on children at risk are getting worse. We are aware of the problem of the number of at-risk children who do not have case workers, which was highlighted by *The Herald*. That situation is inexcusable and must be addressed as a matter of urgency.

A nation can be judged on how it treats its most vulnerable citizens. I would like to think—and the public expect—that there is the political will in all parts of the chamber to ensure that the child protection review and agenda are driven forward with energy and determination. Our responsibility in the SNP is to fulfil our role of providing well-intentioned, constructive criticism and of scrutinising the Government and holding it to account. However, that also means that we can offer strength and support to the minister if he pursues the vital child protection agenda vigorously. Scotland's children are too important to be pushed aside and to be neglected by individuals or by the system. Let us all renew our determination to serve Scotland's children.

I move amendment S2M-593.3, to leave out from "continue" to end and insert:

"; acknowledges its own role in increasing the scale, pace and range of staff recruitment in social work and child care and protection to ensure there are sufficient, well-paid staff to meet current and projected needs, and agrees to

review the role and powers of the Social Work Services Inspectorate in this area."

09:57

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):

I welcome today's debate and the initiatives that the minister has presented, in particular the multi-agency inspection proposals, as well as training and other initiatives. Looking at the 35 recommendations of the report of the inquiry into the death of Caleb Ness, I think that it is a sad fact that most of those recommendations could apply to all councils in Scotland. I hope that every council will read the recommendations and consider how it could adopt the best practice that they outline.

The motion states:

"That the Parliament agrees that keeping Scotland's children and young people safe from harm and neglect must be a priority for all".

We now need to challenge the culture that it is best to keep children with their families at all times. In recent months and years, we have seen that, sadly, a number of cases of child deaths have been at the hands of those who were responsible for them. Indeed, they have sometimes been at the hands of the child's natural parents. Councillor Brian Meek of the City of Edinburgh Council recently wrote:

"as long as those who have to deal with these difficult cases continue to believe that parents or relatives are always to be preferred to all other avenues of care, the killings will go on."

We should listen to that point.

We must stress the need for greatly improved co-operation and communication between agencies, as well as a system that encourages greater responsibility and accountability within the child protection system. I am pleased that the Executive has accepted the amendment in my name in the constructive manner in which it was lodged.

If the shortage of well-trained, experienced social workers impacted only on child protection services, there would perhaps not be so much to concern us today. I sat on the Health and Community Care Committee when it passed the Community Care and Health (Scotland) Bill and the Mental Health (Scotland) Bill, and one of the major issues that arose on those occasions was that there are simply not enough social workers to carry out current work loads, let alone meet the enormous demands of home care, free personal care and respite for the elderly. The Mental Health (Care and Treatment) (Scotland) Act 2003 will be successfully implemented only with a huge increase in the number of social workers and mental health officers. As Fiona Hyslop indicated,

they do not exist in sufficient numbers to meet the current demands on the service, let alone the additional demands for which the Parliament is legislating.

The Health and Community Care Committee agreed that there should be a single budget for community care between the national health service and social work. All members of the committee and all those who gave evidence, bar one, supported that measure. If there is one budget and management system, there is no passing of the buck. In the fullness of time, we may want to revisit that issue.

Shortages of social workers exist right across the service—in care of the elderly, mental health services, drug and alcohol services and child protection services. I am now a member of the Communities Committee, and in the early stages of scrutiny of the Antisocial Behaviour etc (Scotland) Bill it is becoming evident that there are shortages of social workers in that area, too.

During the passage of the Community Care and Health (Scotland) Bill, we were told repeatedly that social work services had been taken from the elderly to fulfil the requirements of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995. Now the requirement to implement the Mental Health (Care and Treatment) (Scotland) Act 2003 takes social work away from children's services, services for the elderly and drug services. For two years, the Osprey centre in Inverness, which helps people with drug and alcohol problems, has had no social worker to support those people's families.

My amendment also emphasises the need for better communication between social workers and other professionals. I cannot forget the evidence of cultural incompatibility between the NHS and social work that I heard while I was a member of the Health and Community Care Committee. We also received written evidence that referred to attitude preciousness. I am pleased that the minister has addressed those points today.

An increase in the number of social work vacancies by a third in a year naturally places a tremendous strain on those who are working to provide the existing service. The report on the Caleb Ness case identifies errors and makes recommendations that sound all too familiar. It states:

"this was an avoidable ... death ... neither parent should have had unsupervised care of Caleb."

The report identifies fault at almost every level in every agency involved. It states that

"many of our recommendations are not new"

and refers to

"the lack of proactive senior social work involvement"

and the

"tendency among professionals in ... agencies to make assumptions about the knowledge, training and actions of others."

The report also states:

"there was a complete failure by Criminal Justice workers and management to recognise that they did have some responsibility for child protection."

As the minister acknowledged, there is evidence to suggest that this was not an isolated case. Many of the comments that I have cited must be made in similar vein in relation to care of the elderly and of mentally ill patients. Despite the legislation that the Parliament has passed, we need assurances that mechanisms are in place across the spectrum of social work to resource, train, support, monitor and audit fully the performance of social workers.

Because of social workers' front-line role, blame is generally directed at them. That is probably inevitable. Most of the tragic child deaths that have occurred and that are associated with alleged mistakes in child protection have involved bad interagency working, poor communication and assumptions being made about what other agencies were aware of. When passing legislation that places greater demands on social workers, the Parliament must ensure that social work departments are resourced and fully able to deliver what we expect of them.

In the case of Danielle Reid in Inverness—the child who ended up at the bottom of the Caledonian canal—despite anonymous phone calls about the behaviour of Danielle's mother a year before the child died, no social worker saw her and there was no home visit. Naturally, the blame fell on social work because, as I understand it, no other agencies were called in to help. For that reason, I welcome the emphasis that has been placed today on interagency working.

There is much evidence to highlight failure in the system of child protection. I hope that the measures that have been announced today will help to protect Scotland's vulnerable children. We can be sure that there will be no improvement unless the old cultures of demarcation are broken down. I welcome what the minister said on that issue.

There will be no improvement until the needs of the child become the leading driver of the service, with greater co-operation among professionals. I welcome what the minister said about breaking down professional barriers and making the child the priority. There will also be no improvement until we can recruit, retain, value and support social work teams in councils throughout Scotland.

Finally, will the minister tell the Parliament how

he will monitor and audit the initiatives that he has outlined today and that the Parliament has welcomed, to ensure that in three years' time we do not have to debate the issues that we are identifying today?

I move amendment S2M-593.1, to insert at end:

“; acknowledges the findings of Susan O'Brien QC's inquiry into the death of Caleb Ness, and as a result calls for greatly improved co-operation and communication between agencies along with new arrangements that encourage greater responsibility and accountability within the child protection system.”

10:06

Ms Rosemary Byrne (South of Scotland) (SSP): I, too, welcome this morning's debate.

Every child has the right to be safe and it is the responsibility of us all to ensure that that happens. That is why I welcome the debate but qualify my welcome with the same sadness that I am sure all members feel about the need for it to take place at all.

Much effort has been made to ensure that child protection procedures and joined-up working between agencies are effective. I welcome the minister's comments today on interagency working. However, we have all had to accept that the system continues to fail our children. Although we welcome reforms, especially those proposals that will develop a multidisciplinary approach and a children's charter, and the provision of additional resources to ChildLine and Parentline, we are concerned that the recruitment and retention campaign to fill vacancies in the social services is inadequate. We are also concerned that social workers, who work in an extremely stressful environment in which they are under-resourced and undervalued, should yet again be under fire from the media and others.

For that reason, the Scottish Socialist Party amendment focuses on the continuing shortage of social workers, especially in child and family teams. We question the ability of the initiatives that the Executive has launched to recruit and retain social workers. Those initiatives are welcome, but they do not go far enough towards rectifying decades of inactivity and ensuring that there is proper work force planning in social work services.

There needs to be a massive inflow of funds to local authorities to allow them to train the committed and experienced unqualified staff who are already in place. The answer to a recent question from Colin Fox about the proportion of staff in residential care units who hold a diploma in social work or equivalent qualification gave the figure of approximately 20 per cent. That is a disgraceful situation, given the vulnerability of young people in such units. If that is the

importance that we give to the care of looked-after children, it is not surprising that the people at the sharp end—those who work within the system—are disillusioned and frustrated.

A determined attempt to attract new people into social work, an increase in salaries to retain social workers in the demanding jobs that they do and a cessation of the blame culture that is expressed at times by members in the chamber and that puts people off entering the profession are essential. More understanding and explanation of the complexity of the tasks that social workers undertake and less populist worker bashing would also be helpful.

Local agreements or differences in salary scales from one local authority to another can only exacerbate the problem. To gain a professional service that can be relied on to protect the most vulnerable young people in our communities, we require a national strategy and agreements.

In a recent debate, I spoke in support of the children's hearings system in Scotland. I believe that that system should be valued and preserved. However, we must all be aware of the concerns raised by members of children's panels about the shortage of social workers and the often frustrating situation in which panel members find themselves when legally binding supervision orders to protect children and young people are not carried out. If we are to restore confidence in the system, our social work services must be adequately resourced and workers must be appropriately trained.

The circumstances surrounding the death of Caleb Ness were associated with drug abuse and that cannot be ignored. Sadly there are many young people and children suffering the effects of drug and alcohol abuse in their lives. Many grandparents are struggling to bring up their grandchildren without appropriate support and many are unable to sleep at night for fear of the risks that their grandchildren might be facing. If we are to address drug and alcohol abuse, we must invest in appropriate services. Members will no doubt be aware that I promote a national strategy for putting in place drug rehabilitation facilities throughout Scotland that are appropriately funded through the national health service. That is crucial if we are to prevent such tragedies in future.

Last week, I visited a family support group in Stranraer and met a group of grandparents who are looking after their grandchildren. The members of that group have been brought together because of drug abuse in their families. They support one another and, among other activities, they run a helpline for others whose lives have been torn apart by drug abuse. I was impressed with the commitment and dedication of the volunteers and workers but was distressed to discover that

anxiety about funding for rent and utilities for their premises was a constant distraction. They were concerned that they might not be able to keep going. I am aware that the Executive is currently undertaking a review of drug treatment. However, I make a plea that such groups receive support immediately.

I ask members to acknowledge the extremely valuable work that social workers carry out every day, which makes significant contributions to the lives of children and their families. I ask members to support the Scottish Socialist Party amendment in my name.

I move amendment S2M-593.2, to insert at end:

“; notes the continuing shortage of social workers, particularly in the child and family teams and that the current initiatives will not produce sufficient new workers to fill these vacancies and replace those due to retire; recognises that the current situation of local authorities competing with each other to attract staff is counter-productive; notes that there is a need to invest significantly to retain and attract future staff; regrets the continuing scapegoating of social workers when things go wrong which only serves to undermine the confidence of staff and contributes to the difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff, and recognises the extremely valuable work that social workers carry out every day making significant contributions to the lives of children and their families.”

10:13

Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): I am pleased to open for the Liberal Democrats. The issue is very serious and emotive and, as health spokesman, I am pleased that there is broad recognition that a multi-agency approach is vital.

There are approximately 1 million children in Scotland, including almost a third of a million 16 to 21-year olds. Unfortunately many of them are among the most vulnerable members of our society, with one in five children entitled to free school meals and an estimated one in 10 living with domestic violence.

The report “It’s everyone’s job to make sure I’m alright” noted that

“many adults and children have little confidence in the child protection system and are considerably reluctant to report concerns about abuse or neglect”

and that 40 per cent of the children questioned when the report was being drawn up did not feel protected or had not had their needs met. That is an unacceptably high figure. The tragic death of Caleb Ness has brought the issue into sharp focus and I hope that we can all work together to improve the current situation.

A multi-agency approach to the issue is necessary and I welcome the Executive’s robust approach as outlined in its motion. It is absolutely correct that the Executive should be seeking

assurances from local authority and health board chief executives and chief constables in each child protection committee area. Similarly, where there is a multi-agency approach to child protection, there must be a multi-agency approach to the inspection of those services, and I welcome the fact that the Executive is developing proposals to do just that. It is expected that that will lead to a clear and independent assessment of the standard of protection that is being implemented.

However, there are two issues that must be considered if the approach is to be successful and, more important, if the Scottish people are to have confidence in the system. First, it must be made clear who is responsible for child protection services. A joined-up approach involving various agencies is all very well—and it is good—but the buck has to stop with someone. I ask for that to be clarified.

Secondly, and on the same theme, where the new, independent and, I hope, rigorous inspection process identifies problems in the service, a system must be put in place that will ensure that the Executive has the power to make sure that the problems highlighted are dealt with quickly and effectively. The system must ensure that someone from one of the various agencies is ultimately responsible for carrying out those improvements and that no one is allowed to pass the buck. I agree that it is everyone’s job, but we must make sure that it is also someone’s job.

I agreed whole-heartedly with the moves to develop a multidisciplinary approach but there can be little argument that social work departments have a key role. It is good to hear that there is a record number of social workers in Scotland. However, we are aware that social work departments throughout the country face recruitment and retention problems. I understand that there are more than 400 vacancies and an increasing number of early retirement requests. I welcome many of the innovative schemes that the Executive has implemented to tackle the issue. I am told that outside Marks and Spencer in Aberdeen last Saturday there was a huge inflatable advertising board encouraging people to train as social workers. Financial packages worth up to £9,000 per student are being offered to encourage new graduates to work in areas where there is a shortage, such as children and families teams.

That is fine and good, but I am concerned about the practice of local authorities outbidding one another in a race to recruit social workers from other areas. There have been reports of incentives of up to £5,000 for new recruits and even for existing staff who will agree to stay in the job for at least three years. That practice could be self-defeating. Are we robbing Peter to pay Paul? I

appreciate that there are severe demands on social work departments but, with a national shortage in the profession, if that continues, social workers will end up working not where they are most needed but where the council has the deepest pockets. That should not be allowed to happen and I urge the Executive to monitor the situation closely and ensure value for money for the public purse by making sure that financial incentives are targeted at the areas where the need is greatest.

Tommy Sheridan: Mike Rumbles seems to be saying that we need to have a national strategy on social worker shortages so that we do not have to rob Peter to pay Paul. He then talks about prioritising the resourcing of areas where there is the highest demand. An area of high demand in one year might not be the same in the next year. Does Mike Rumbles accept that we need to have a national strategy on pay and conditions?

Mike Rumbles: I am happy to accept that. I raise the issue because I am concerned that we might be robbing Peter to pay Paul in the short term.

The Protection of Children (Scotland) Act 2003 should go a long way to addressing many of the concerns about the suitability of many people who work with our children. The establishment of a list of those people who are deemed to be unsuitable to work with children is a welcome step forward, but rigorous steps must be put in place to ensure that organisations adhere to their duty to refer people to the list and that those that do not are dealt with severely. There can be no leeway in that and people will have to realise that the Executive takes that act very seriously.

Today's debate is a reminder of our responsibilities, but I would like to think that no reminder is needed. It is a chance to reaffirm our commitment to ensuring that the various stakeholder agencies, including local authorities, health boards and the police, work together to improve child protection services. It must be made absolutely clear who has ultimate responsibility for child protection.

10:20

Scott Barrie (Dunfermline West) (Lab): I am pleased to speak in this important debate—although the fact that we are holding it against the background of the recently published Caleb Ness report is probably weighing on all of us.

I want first to pick up on a couple of points that Mary Scanlon made. She suggested that we should seek to end the practice of children being kept in their own families at all costs. I point out to her and to others that both the Children Act 1989 and the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 say that,

whenever possible, children should be brought up in their natural families. However, the overarching principle is that any action should be in the best interests of the children. Although there is a presumption that children should be brought up in their own families, the 1989 and 1995 acts make it clear that the interests of the child are paramount.

Mary Scanlon also suggested that we are on a social work merry-go-round. She suggested that, over the past 10 or so years, because of developments in community care, social workers have first been attracted to community care, then taken from community care to bolster the measures on child care in the 1995 act, and then taken from child care to work on mental health. That is not an image of social work that I recognise. Most social workers, once they have decided which part of social work they wish to specialise in, stay in that specialism. If someone specialises in child care—as I did—they remain in child care irrespective of any legislative changes.

Mary Scanlon: Sir Stewart Sutherland wrote the report on long-term care for the elderly. He said that councils had taken resources from care of the elderly and diverted them into social work. That was part of the evidence.

Scott Barrie: Mary Scanlon talks about resources, but that does not necessarily mean social workers—valuable though they are to local authorities. Somehow or other, she misunderstands what Sir Stewart said in that context. The picture that she paints of social work is not the one that I see.

When I trained in social work in the early 1980s, the two names that struck fear into social workers when we talked about child protection were Maria Caldwell and Jasmine Beckford from the 1970s. Reading the Caleb Ness report, I was struck by the fact that the names Maria Caldwell or Jasmine Beckford could almost have been substituted for that of Caleb Ness. Thirty years on, the issue remains the same—communication or, rather, the lack of communication between agencies entrusted to deal with child protection. Every time a report is published, the organisation affected by the report improves its communications to prevent the same thing happening again but, meanwhile, someone somewhere else forgets those lessons and communication breaks down. It is not just one agency that is entrusted with child protection—it is not even just one or two agencies—we are all responsible, as others have said.

We have to ensure that the systems work properly. A key part of that is the case conference mechanism. The sharing of information has leaped ahead remarkably over the past 10 to 15 years. The old idea that agencies should keep information exclusively to themselves in the interests of client confidentiality has gone.

However, different people still hold different pieces of the jigsaw and—even in participation and case conferences—the whole picture does not emerge. That is clearly what happened in the Caleb Ness case. The authority that was responsible for Caleb Ness's mother's older children had salient information, but that information was not asked for. The authority was not asked its opinion even though it was denying the mother unsupervised access. People in the criminal justice system were not asked for their opinion, and the police were not given complete information about the father. We have to learn from those mistakes and be sure that they do not happen again.

Shona Robison (Dundee East) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Scott Barrie: Sorry, I am in my last minute.

There is a difficulty with current structures: we have 32 local authorities, eight police forces and 15 health boards. Getting those organisations to work together in a coherent fashion is quite difficult in some cases. In my area, it is easier because the police, local authority and health board areas have coterminous boundaries. However, that is the case very rarely in Scotland. We should not underestimate the structural difficulties.

Some have suggested that we need a much more robust social work inspection regime. I agree, but we should not underestimate the challenges that that would pose for child protection. Because of the multidisciplinary nature of social work, having an inspection regime that covers all the different areas will be incredibly difficult. We should not kid ourselves that simply having a more robust inspection regime will somehow make all the agencies work together more effectively in future.

10:26

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): Although this debate is about child protection, I preface my contribution by saying, as Mary Scanlon said, that all my words could apply equally to vulnerable adults—whether they have learning, mental, emotional or physical difficulties, or are just elderly. I have looked at the Caleb Ness report and parts of it could have applied equally to the Miss X case. I will not dwell on that point but the connection is clear. The report talks about

"Failure to take account of the background information readily available".

Ditto, the Miss X Case.

"Social workers allowed themselves to be easily reassured".

Ditto, the Miss X case.

"The whole Child Protection Case Conference process was flawed."

Case conferences for Miss X were also flawed.

Scott Barrie's contribution was extremely interesting and I defer to his professional experience. However, there is no doubt that, even when all the professionals are together, information is not shared. To some extent, a bit of professional protectionism is going on.

The report also found

"several significant problems ... in the recording and sharing of accurate documentation relating to a baby known to be at risk."

Ditto, the Miss X case.

"The social worker and health visitor ... were supposed to visit"

but did not do so

"often enough in the circumstances".

Ditto, the Miss X case. She was not visited for nearly four months despite the fact that a member of the household had a guardian appointed who could have entered the household at any time.

The report continues:

"We identified the lack of proactive senior social work involvement in the assessment of risk, in the re-assessment of risk, in decision making"

and so on. Ditto, the Miss X case.

Tragically, as there are with children, there are many cases in Scotland involving adults. We cannot attribute everything to the systems; it also has to do with the personnel involved.

Following the Miss X case, three reports were commissioned by Scottish Borders Council. Only after that did the case go to the social work services inspectorate. That was when I first became interested in the role of the inspectorate. I was pleased to hear what the minister said about taking a multi-agency approach. The inspectorate should be given real teeth. From my experience of the prisons inspectorate for Scotland, I know that, even when there are rigorous and robust reports from the chief inspector of prisons, sometimes things do not change. If we are to have an inspectorate, we want something that can actually change things for people on the ground, including the professionals who are working in the system.

I understand, from an answer from Euan Robson, the Deputy Minister for Education and Young People, that the social work services inspectorate report should have been published in August. It has not yet been published, although I understand that it is with the deputy minister. Perhaps someone will advise me. Does the minister want to intervene?

The Deputy Minister for Education and Young People (Euan Robson) indicated disagreement.

Christine Grahame: I thought that the minister wanted to intervene. Ah well.

I will move on to whistleblowing. It is terribly serious when people—whether they are members of the public or, in particular, professionals—want to say something but cannot. During the Miss X case, I received a dossier from 10 social workers scattered across the Borders. Since then, other members of the social work department have contacted me on different issues. I do not necessarily want to receive that information but those people felt that they could not—*[Interruption.]* I will not take a sneer from Mr Robson, because I did not seek out those people. In many cases, I do not have their contact numbers—they got in touch with me. They will not use the whistleblowing system within Scottish Borders Council, because they do not feel secure. That is a real issue.

Social workers in Scottish Borders Council were issued with a letter that said that, if they got in touch with the press, they would be in breach of their contract. That is fair enough, given that that is in their contract. However, there was also an allusion to the fact that, if they got in touch with me, they would be breaching their contract, because I might go to the press. I am an MSP who represents their area and their interests. As constituents, they have every right to approach their MSP. It is no wonder that those professionals feel that they are being bullied and that they cannot go to other people because, if they do, they will be disciplined for showing weaknesses in the system. That is a serious issue. I have taken up with Scottish Borders Council the nature of the letter that was sent out.

Multi-agency working is essential. Housing associations, which are agencies that the minister did not mention, are crucial. A housing association or a housing department will often know that something might be going on in a household. I would add housing associations to the list.

I wish that I had before me a document that someone showed me recently. I think that it had just been produced by the City of Edinburgh Council, Scottish Borders Council and West Lothian Council or Midlothian Council. I will track it down for the minister. I discussed it with someone who had been a senior social worker. The system that it contained has already been shelved because, although it was supposed to be about interagency working, it was not about that; it was simply about social work departments and systems and how they should work.

There is a huge cultural barrier to overcome. The word demarcation may be used. There is a preciousness among professionals about their systems interlocking, which affects not only the sharing of information but the sharing of funding.

That is a huge hurdle for the Executive to overcome; it is an even bigger hurdle for the individuals concerned.

I, too, commend the many grass-roots social workers who are dealing with extremely difficult situations and making very difficult decisions on the front line, day in, day out. Like the vulnerable, they deserve the right systems, funding and leadership. That will ensure that they do not take the blame for things that are not their fault.

10:32

Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): I would like to address one idea and one concern. The idea is the case for a national child protection helpline. The concern relates to the report “Dealing with offending by young people” and its follow-up report, which was published this month. I will discuss how that report links into today’s debate.

Children 1st is lobbying all members on the case for a national child protection helpline. It believes that the establishment of a single, central number would address a number of problems and concerns that have been identified by the public, professionals, children’s charities and politicians. People are often unsure about to whom they should report concerns, or are worried about the consequences of reporting their concerns. Children 1st knows that that is a problem from calls that have been made to ParentLine Scotland, which it runs, and from the work that it does with children and families.

The findings of the Scottish Executive’s report of the child protection audit and review demonstrate the same concern. One contributor to the report said:

“if you see somebody breaking into a house you know to go to the police, if you’re concerned about a child you don’t really know what to do.”

The outcome of recent reports into child deaths reinforces the need for such a helpline. The findings of the North East of Scotland Child Protection Committee inquiry into the death of Carla Nicole Bone highlighted the need for more information and improved public accessibility for reporting concerns about children.

A single, national telephone number for people to report concerns or—this is important—to discuss what kind of action, if any, they should take, would offer a clear point of contact for anyone who was worried about a child. Although the number would be national, the helpline would have to be linked to local services as children can only be protected locally.

Our collective goal should be not just to enable people to report concerns, but to motivate everyone actively to promote child protection so

that there are fewer and fewer concerns to report. A national helpline would be an extremely valuable resource in helping to prevent, and to end, child cruelty and neglect.

I turn to the Audit Scotland report "Dealing with offending by young people". As children are offended against, they move from oppressed misery to acting out. That is followed by challenging behaviour and, finally, offending behaviour. That is the net result of a system that does not adequately protect our children.

I have been studying Audit Scotland's report and it seems that many of our young offenders have previously been failed, in one way or another, by our child protection services. Seven councils are not providing the required levels of supervision—50 per cent of all the children in Scotland who are on supervision are seen less than once a month. For many years—this year, the year before, at the end of the 1990s, at the beginning of the 1990s, at the end of the 1980s and at the beginning of the 1980s, when I was working in the children's panel system, which is almost 25 years ago—chairs of children's panels have been complaining that the provision of social work services is insufficient to cope with the panels' disposals. There is not even a national standard for the supervision of children, who, it can be argued, are vulnerable and most in need of help, even though there is a standard for adults on probation, who must be seen weekly for the first month, every fortnight for the next two months and then at least monthly.

Scott Barrie: On national standards, does the member accept that the 1990 national standard for criminal justice, which specified to the court what could be expected from a probation order, was a huge improvement? If a supervision requirement has been recommended, social workers and the children's panel should be very clear about what level of contact is required, particularly in the early stages of supervision. We all know that that period is the most crucial.

Robin Harper: I am happy to accept Scott Barrie's recommendations.

Although care plans are required by statute, more than a third of children on supervision do not have proper care plans—that is the figure for this month. The system is in a state of near breakdown. As has been mentioned already, we cannot even fill vacant posts for qualified social workers in children's services. Nearly 15 per cent of those posts were not filled in October 2002. In other words, we need another 247 social workers who are qualified to help children. I do not know how long it would take to train that number, but I guess that a year's output from our colleges would be required.

Audit Scotland's report also points out that only

one authority in Scotland meets the police target of referring 80 per cent of all concerns to the children's reporter within 14 days. I do not understand why the police cannot be capable of referring concerns immediately and why the target is not referral within 48 hours; I certainly think that it should be. I contend that any concerns about a young child cannot possibly be a matter for internal debate by the police—they should be referred immediately to the children's reporter, who, after all, is an expert in such matters, to decide how the problem should be dealt with.

When "Dealing with offending by young people" was written, only eight of our 32 councils had care plans for more than 80 per cent of the children on supervision. Is it not an indictment of our children's fieldwork services that, in two thirds of our councils, more than 10 per cent of the posts for qualified children's social workers are vacant and that, in nearly a quarter of councils, more than 20 per cent of such posts are unfilled?

Audit Scotland's report was limited because its scope was limited to dealing with offending by young people, but a huge majority of those young people have been offended against, not only by members of their own families, by poverty and by the circumstances of their birth, but by a system that is failing them.

I welcome not only the rhetoric of the Executive's motion, but the clear evidence that action is going to be taken; I also welcome Audit Scotland's report.

10:39

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton (Lothians) (Con): There have been some strong speeches in this morning's debate. I think that we are all in agreement that the protection of children should be of paramount importance. I mention my interest as chairman of the Edinburgh support group of the charity Hope and Homes for Children and the fact that I helped to pilot the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 on to the statute book.

If eternal vigilance is the price that is to be paid for freedom, it is also the price that has to be paid for the protection of children. It is right that the debate has concentrated heavily on the supreme tragedy that befell Caleb Ness. The social workers whom I have known have been dedicated, selfless and highly professional people who were engaged in difficult work but, like the rest of us, social workers are not infallible. Their job is extremely important and necessarily involves a high degree of training. They are often overworked and understaffed. Therefore, it is vital that staffing is brought up to strength and that continuing efforts are made over a prolonged period of time to make that goal a reality.

That leads me to the essential question as to what went wrong in the case of Caleb Ness. It seems to me that there needs to be a re-examination of the culture that appears to exist within social work departments, which is that it is best to keep children with their families at all times. Frankly, I believe that a more important premise must be that the protection of the child should always be the overriding priority.

Tommy Sheridan: Given the publicity that any decision to remove a child from a home attracts if that move is then found to be unnecessary, does the member agree that the pressure on social workers not to remove children from homes is understandable?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Absolutely. The Children (Scotland) Act 1995 went through after the case in Orkney that was given such prominence. Such decisions are not easy. The member makes an important point, but I believe that the overriding premise should always be the protection of the child.

Sadly, most of the tragedies involving children in which there have been alleged mistakes by social work departments have involved poor interagency working and communication, which have resulted in a lack of accountability or willingness to take responsibility. That point was highlighted by Fiona Hyslop. We must ensure that that changes.

The recommendations of Susan O'Brien QC, who conducted the independent inquiry, are of great significance and need to be acted upon. Some of the points that she raised have surfaced before, following other child-murder cases of a desperately distressing nature, but that serves to reinforce their importance.

In particular, the minister must take up and implement three of Susan O'Brien's recommendations. First, she recommended that the child protection guidelines be amended so that health care professionals should notify the social work department if they anticipate that there may be risk to the child after birth, even if that means breaking the duty of confidentiality. That recommendation needs to be looked into. Secondly, it was her contention that children and families services and criminal justice social work services should review their joint working practices as a matter of urgency. Thirdly, she recommended that all agencies should make it a priority to collaborate in putting in place effective risk-assessment processes to underpin decision making.

Those matters are so important that the protection of children should receive all-party support. I am glad that the Deputy Minister for Education and Young People, Euan Robson, said:

"The Executive is delivering a three year programme of

sustained activity to improve child protection and ensure that the protection of Scotland's children continues to be a top priority, as pledged in our new Partnership Agreement."

That message has been reinforced by today's statement from Mr Peacock that the services need to be improved. I welcome the letter that he sent to the Education Committee, in which the review of services, multidisciplinary inspections, and child protection training for social workers are mentioned.

Much has been done under successive Governments but there is no cause whatsoever for either complacency or inactivity. A great deal more remains to be done. It would be fair to say that, if the different agencies and their employees had the knowledge that we now have, they would have been able to prevent the tragedy that befell Caleb Ness—

Scott Barrie: Will the member give way?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Let me finish this point. Susan O'Brien made the critical comment that the death was avoidable, as Mary Scanlon pointed out in her speech.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): The member is in his last minute, so Scott Barrie must be very quick.

Scott Barrie: The member has made the point about what might have been done had people known then what we know now. However, one of the big features of the Caleb Ness report is that it highlights that the information existed but was not readily available to people involved in the case conference. In particular, the fact that two siblings of Caleb Ness were in the care of another local authority but that that local authority was not asked to the case conference seems to me a pretty salient point in the whole process.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I think that what Scott Barrie has said is correct, but my point is that the information that we now know was not known across the board. There was insufficient interagency working. We must learn from that.

We owe it to the memory of Caleb to do everything within our power to make certain that such an eventuality does not happen again. We would fail in our duty if we did not assist in putting in place the necessary safeguards. Our country expects nothing less.

10:45

Janis Hughes (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab): As has been said many times this morning, there can be no doubt about the importance of partnership working among those who deal with children—particularly vulnerable children—and young adults. The Executive is to be congratulated on working to ensure that all agencies are moving

towards co-ordinated strategies for ensuring child protection. The fact that ministers from two different areas of the Executive are participating in this morning's debate shows the Executive's commitment to partnership working.

We have heard much this morning about local authority provision but I want to focus on the provision of health care for Scotland's children, which is an area in which much work has to be done. The Executive's 2001 publication "For Scotland's children" painted a bleak picture. It showed that services were often fragmented and that support was poorly targeted and often came too late to make significant improvement. It also highlighted how those who used services for the most vulnerable children were stigmatised. However, I am pleased to say that we have moved on from that.

At the risk of seeming a bit parochial, I want to consider the work that has been done by NHS Greater Glasgow on these issues. I am not always vocal in my support of the health board, but I believe in giving praise where it is due. Members will be aware of the recent document "Making It Work For Scotland's Children: Child Health Support Group Overview Report 2003", which praised NHS Greater Glasgow. The report said:

"Despite the complexity of working with a network of six local authority partners, NHS Greater Glasgow demonstrates strong leadership and a commitment to integrated planning, particularly in Glasgow. This is reflected in examples of innovative and integrated services with a strong focus on vulnerable and disadvantaged groups."

Improving support for parents is a key component of protecting vulnerable children in Scotland. One good example of how NHS Greater Glasgow is providing support for families with pre-school children and beyond can be seen in the network of family centres throughout Glasgow and Lanarkshire. Last year, I accompanied the then Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care on a visit to the Cambuslang family centre in my constituency. The centre is an excellent example of partnership working between the health service and the local authority, which in this case is South Lanarkshire Council.

Cambuslang family centre is essentially a drop-in centre, where parents and other family members can go to seek advice and support on problems that they may be experiencing with their children. As well as providing support groups and counselling facilities, the centre offers guidance and help with good parenting techniques. Complementary therapies are also on offer to provide an holistic approach to children and their families. Access to other agencies, such as Scottish Women's Aid, is also available. The centre is an excellent facility that aims to provide a service that is both proactive and reactive to

ensure that our children are well-supported and safe in our community.

The appointment by February of a children's commissioner will be a crucial step towards improving child protection. The proposed introduction of a multi-agency inspection system is another positive move. However, as we have heard this morning, recent cases have highlighted how much remains to be done, especially on joint working. Scott Barrie mentioned earlier how difficult it is for the 32 local authorities and 15 health boards to work together in areas such as my own where boundaries are not coterminous, as they are in Fife. There are definitely problems that must be overcome, but I am glad that we are moving towards better interagency working.

In the national health service, it is imperative that staff are aware of the need to ensure that children who present with symptoms that may be a result of abuse are not allowed to slip through the net. Obviously, there is a need to maintain patient confidentiality but I am aware that there are clear General Medical Council guidelines on when it is in order to do that. Unfortunately, it is a fact of life that we sometimes have to rule out neglect rather than rule it in. As one who worked in the accident and emergency department at Yorkhill hospital in Glasgow, I am only too well aware that children often attend hospital with perfectly innocent bumps and bruises and that it is not always easy to distinguish between the accidental and the deliberate.

Scott Barrie: Does Janis Hughes accept that one difficulty is that, too often, other agencies pass on lots of information to social work departments but then leave the decision on what to do about the situation to those departments, rather than try to make a judgment in the first place, as she was right to suggest? On child protection, we sometimes say too readily that everything should be passed on and that somebody, somewhere should make the decision, as long as it is not us.

Janis Hughes: That is an important point. We must accept that decisions in such cases should never rest with one person and should always be taken jointly, whether on an interagency basis or through joint working among agencies.

Interagency working and information sharing will allow health care professionals the opportunity to make more informed decisions. The Caleb Ness inquiry report said that that was a significant problem in the case. Although there was evidence of joint working between health visitors and social workers, it did not lead to a conclusion that any of us would have expected from joint agency working.

The issue is emotive and I am sure that all parties share the common goal of providing the

best protection for our children. I congratulate the Executive on the work that it has done but remind it that much more remains to be done. I support the motion.

10:51

Campbell Martin (West of Scotland) (SNP): I do not think that we will hear in the debate any arguments against the principle of child protection, which lies behind the motion and the amendments. I am thankful that most people consider hurting children to be one of the most unacceptable crimes. That is why the political parties are prepared to work together to tackle the problems that lead to children's going unprotected and being hurt physically or psychologically.

We all want to tackle the problems and to make child protection more effective. I hope that the Executive accepts that any criticisms or points from Opposition parties are made constructively and in an effort ultimately to make life better and safer for all children in Scotland.

Child protection covers every aspect of life in which children are involved. I will refer to two aspects—child protection in local government social service delivery and child protection in schools, which has not been mentioned. In local government, the phrase “recruitment and retention problems” means that we have a shortage of social workers and social care workers and that overworked and stressed workers fill our departments. Ultimately, that means that young people and children do not receive the care and help that they need.

We must prevent children from falling through the net, to which the minister referred in his opening speech. He said that the First Minister, Jack McConnell, has given the Executive three years to get the child protection programme right. We all support that. However, I take members back two years to 20 March 2001, when the then Minister for Education, Europe and External Affairs—Jack McConnell—announced a review of child protection procedures and said:

“It is vital that we do more than just talk about joined up working. We must ensure that everyone—local government, agencies and departments work better together locally to give the best service possible to our young people. No child should ever fall through the protection net just because professionals fail to work closely together.”

That was said two years ago, and the First Minister has now given us three years to get the system right. That makes five years in which things could have been done better and children could have been better protected. I do not think that the Labour members who are laughing should do so; we are talking about children.

Scott Barrie: Will the member give way?

Campbell Martin: No, thank you. The member should sit down.

The reality of the situation is shown by social workers in North Ayrshire, who broke ranks, spoke out and raised concerns. As they are professionals, they raised concerns not for themselves or their jobs, but for the people for whom they knew that they were failing to deliver services.

That is the reality that lies behind the phrase “recruitment and retention problems”. The reality kicks in when it means that trained and committed social workers are walking away from jobs because they do not feel valued or that their employers respect the challenging role that they undertake day in, day out. The reality day in, day out in North Ayrshire is that social workers feel that they are failing children. In residential care settings in North Ayrshire, it is not unusual for so few staff to be on duty that violence is increasing against staff and the people whom they are supposed to look after.

Irene Oldfather (Cunninghame South) (Lab): Will the member give way?

Campbell Martin: No, thank you.

Occasionally in North Ayrshire, children in residential care settings sleep on couches and social workers must leave children who are at risk in the family home because they cannot find a place in which to put them. That is the reality that the Executive must address.

The other aspect of local government involvement in child protection is the belief of some councils that they are being asked to assume more responsibilities and burdens without Executive funding to do so. I will return to that before I finish my speech, but I will move on to child protection in schools.

Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con): Will Campbell Martin give way?

Campbell Martin: No, thanks. I want to talk about the important issue of child protection in schools, because it has not been mentioned.

When we hand over our children to be educated in schools every day, we trust schools to protect them and ask the education system to do that. Unfortunately, he is not in the chamber at the moment, but I ask the minister who will sum up—I respect the fact that he is the Minister for Health and Community Care and that he will have to take advice on my question—whether it is right for a child to have to share a classroom with another pupil who has twice assaulted that child in the classroom when the teacher was present. Is it right that two female pupils whom that pupil, who

has also assaulted other pupils, has inappropriately touched in the class must share a classroom with that pupil? Is it right that the same pupil's behaviour has resulted in the whole class having to leave the classroom and be taken to the school library while the teacher and other adults restrained and calmed that pupil? That is happening in schools in Scotland. What level of protection is the education service providing the parents of those children?

I close with a quotation from North Ayrshire Council's chief executive about the additional social service provision burdens that have been placed on councils. In a letter to me, the chief executive said:

"the price of failure to meet the targets and the challenges set by the Executive will be the demise of generic Social Work Departments controlled by local councils."

I sincerely hope that the minister will address that in his summing up.

10:57

Margaret Smith (Edinburgh West) (LD): I apologise for arriving slightly late for the debate.

Many of us speak in the debate with sadness about the recent events in Edinburgh in relation to the tragic death of Caleb Ness and the publication of the report into that, which also resulted in the sad loss of Les McEwan as the head of the social work department in Edinburgh. He gave 36 years of his life to his work and probably saved many children in his time, and I pay tribute to his high standards during his period of service to the people of Edinburgh.

As we listen to the speeches from members of all parties—some speeches have been very good—it is, sadly, clear that the Caleb Ness report could just as easily have been written about any number of children on any number of occasions. It is sad that the points that have been made are not new and have not been grasped, tackled and dealt with properly in the past. That means that we must worry that such matters will not be grasped, tackled and dealt with properly in the future. However, the report reminds us of the importance of getting child protection right and of the role that all of us play in achieving that.

Last February, the First Minister said:

"Radical improvements are essential. But the bottom line is that if the system goes on failing to protect children, then we will not protect the system."

I concur. I welcome the Executive's commitment to reform child protection services, because we must do all that we can to protect the more than 2,000 children who are in our care on protection registers. We must deal not only with cases that

result in children being killed, but with the impact on children who survive to a future of prostitution, self-harm, mental health problems or offending behaviour. Many other consequences result from the treatment of such children by their parents and by others and from the fact that they are at risk.

The report called "It's everyone's job to make sure I'm alright" audited the various agencies' practices and made it clear that good communication between agencies is crucial to good child protection. We have heard today that that communication does not always happen. In the Caleb Ness case, the information existed but people did not share it properly.

Professionals sometimes think that it is more important to hold on to information or that they will be in breach of confidentiality in some way if they pass it on. If a child is at risk, to hell with confidentiality and professional barriers—that should be the bottom line. The fact that a child is at risk should take precedence over parents' rights, over professional rights and over everything. We must get that message across to professionals so that they know that they have that protection behind them.

Christine Grahame: Will the member take an intervention?

Margaret Smith: I have quite a lot to say and I would like to get on with it.

It is clear from the audit that 40 per cent of children do not feel protected. They are the Caleb Nesses of the future and it is up to us to put in place structures to protect them. I welcome what the Executive is committed to do in its three-year programme and what the minister says about multi-agency inspections and national standards. We are moving in a good direction, but there is much more still to do.

We are working against the background of increasing numbers of children being brought up in abuse and neglect and of problems with retention of social workers. I hear what my colleagues say about record numbers of social workers. We should acknowledge the good work that the Scottish Executive has done on that, but we have a major problem if we are losing experienced social workers because of stress and because no one is saying to them that, although we focus on the Caleb Nesses of this world, we also focus on the thousands of other pieces of work that they have done during the year and that they have got right.

Tommy Sheridan: Will the member take an intervention?

Margaret Smith: No.

We must ensure that we value the work that goes on in our child protection agencies as well as

focusing on them when things do not go right.

The report into the death of Caleb Ness concluded that

“this was an avoidable child death”

and that failures were found at every level in every agency that was involved. I acknowledge the work that the City of Edinburgh Council and its partner agencies are doing to respond effectively to the 35 recommendations that were made in the independent report. Council leader Donald Anderson said in a recent letter to MSPs:

“It is no longer enough to say that we have procedures in place and that staff are expected to follow these. In the aftermath of this inquiry report, we have to ensure that there is in place a system of checks and balances designed to mitigate risk.”

Other councils should note that. There but for the grace of God goes every council in the country. It just happens to have been Edinburgh, which has twice the national average number of children on the risk register.

The City of Edinburgh Council and NHS Lothian are taking forward a comprehensive review of child protection procedures and practice. They are reviewing all the cases that are on their books and investing in extra clerical and managerial staff. They are also considering case conference procedures. In the Caleb Ness report, it struck me how ineffective the case conference had been. The report makes sobering reading; the process was flawed, and there was no indication that the conference took into account the two older children who were already in care, the criminal records of both parents, the father's brain injury or the child's health. Those seem to be fundamental errors and I am glad that the council and the Executive are looking again at the role of case conferences.

At the end of the day, Caleb Ness was murdered not by Lothian police, NHS Lothian or the City of Edinburgh Council but by his father. However, if we step back and allow children to remain at risk, we are all culpable.

Euan Robson: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I refer to a comment that a member made earlier. I do not have the report that was referred to by Ms Grahame. Scottish Borders Council has received the findings of fact on which the analysis and recommendations will be based. As is the usual practice, Scottish Borders Council can confirm or question the findings of fact—which has in fact now happened. The full report, with its recommendations, will be sent to Scottish Borders Council next week for comments. Only thereafter will ministers receive the chief social work inspector's report, which is of course entirely independent of councils and ministers.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh):

Thank you. That is not, of course, a point of order, but I am sure that members will understand why the minister wanted to give that explanation.

We move to the next speaker—

Fiona Hyslop: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Do you recognise that a point of order should refer to the standing orders of the Parliament, and that under the standing orders the minister can make an intervention at any time during a debate? Perhaps that would have been the most appropriate time to make such a contribution.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: In general, it is probably in the interests of the conduct of debate that the chair should rule on points of order, rather than that members should jump up to rule on them. I intend to move on.

11:05

Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con): I welcome the debate on this extremely important subject and the motion's recognition of the requirement for

“local authorities, NHS boards and the police to review their practices in respect of child protection”.

In particular, I welcome the amendment that calls for

“greatly improved co-operation and communication between agencies”.

If we are to move on and learn from the tragedy of the Caleb Ness case and other distressing cases, it is essential that the willingness of the agencies involved to co-operate and take responsibility to address the fault lines is not suffocated and stifled in a blame culture.

Child protection is a huge issue and it seems to me to be much more complex than it was 30 years ago, when I began my teaching career in what was then termed a deprivation area. At that time, it was not uncommon for a child to turn up at school after an absence with a note of apology that explained that the absence was due to the child having no shoes. Despite the poverty, I had no doubt that parents—many of whom were single—had as their top priority the welfare of their children.

Over the years, the balance has shifted markedly. Today, children all too often feature at number 4 or 5 in the list of parental priorities—lower than parents' social lives and dependencies. Worse, in recent months I have been appalled at the conditions in which some children live, which are reminiscent of Victorian times. As a result of drug or alcohol dependency, some parents are incapable of looking after themselves, let alone

their children. Such parents can be capable of getting their act together sufficiently and are articulate enough to pass the formal interview at which their ability to continue looking after their children is assessed. The shortage of social workers means that the on-going assessment and checks that should back up the interview with follow-up visits do not take place. The chaos—and often the squalor—of the child's home life is not detected and not addressed. In such circumstances, there is a clear need for interagency co-operation. The merging of social work and health would greatly aid that and lead to a better service.

I want to highlight the potential threat that the internet poses to child safety. There is a disaster waiting to happen: it is just a matter of time before a serious incident of child abuse results from contact made through the net. In the United Kingdom, an estimated 4.8 million children go online, of whom more than 1 million are under 14. Some 65 per cent of 16 to 17-year-olds in the UK have used the web and are frequent users of e-mail. Of those young people, 62 per cent use the internet at home. In most cases, children's knowledge of the internet far outstrips that of their parents, who are, by and large, unaware of the potential danger from the online activity of paedophiles.

In June 2000, the National Centre for Missing and Exploited Children, in the United States, published a survey into the victimisation of children over the net. The study involved 1,500 children aged between 10 and 17 who regularly used the net. The findings revealed that, of the children surveyed,

"one in five received a sexual solicitation or approach over the Internet in the last year."

The survey concluded:

"Sadly the internet is not always the safe, educational and recreational environment we would have hoped for our young people."

At Westminster, legislation has been passed to tackle paedophile grooming activity online. There is a new criminal offence relating to meeting a child with intent to commit a sexual offence and a new criminal order to protect children from an adult making contact with them for a harmful or unlawful sexual purpose whether by e-mail, an internet chat room or at the school gate.

I have asked the Scottish Executive several times to ensure that we have the same protection in Scotland as exists south of the border, where clause 17 of the Sexual Offenders Bill, which does not apply to Scotland, provides that for offences of grooming of children, offenders can be jailed for up to 10 years. Each time, the Executive's response has been ambiguous; it has referred to

the offence being covered by lewd, indecent and libidinous practices, but has stated that it is considering whether the law in this area needs to be strengthened.

Today, in this important debate, I ask the Scottish Executive again to ensure that we have the same protection in Scotland that the grooming offence and clause 17 of the Sexual Offenders Bill provide in England. I am baffled by why the Executive should hesitate to ensure that we have that belt-and-braces protection. In the meantime, I commend the "Webwise" leaflet produced by Hamilton crime prevention panel and the Chatdanger campaign supported by Carol Vorderman for ensuring that awareness is raised and for suggesting commonsense measures to protect children using the internet.

11:11

Dr Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab): In the early hours of 17 May 2000, Kennedy McFarlane, then aged three years and one month, was admitted to Dumfries and Galloway royal infirmary in a state of collapse. She died a few hours later in intensive care. Staff at Kennedy's playschool had registered their concerns about her well-being in the February. A range of injuries, including injuries to her eyes, her face and her urinary tract and signs of drug ingestion, was subsequently reported to health visitors, to GPs, to social workers and to the local hospital. The agencies involved agreed to hold a child protection case conference in May 2000. However, before the conference was held, Kennedy's mother's partner, Thomas Duncan, violently murdered her, a crime for which he is now serving a life sentence.

Astonishingly, prior to Kennedy's death, no one had asked about Mr Duncan, despite the fact that the abuse coincided with his move into the family home. Dumfries and Galloway's child protection committee commissioned an inquiry into the circumstances surrounding Kennedy McFarlane's death. That inquiry was conducted by Dr Helen Hammond, whose report, which was published in September 2000, found that although Kennedy's violent death could not have been predicted, it could have been prevented.

Three years ago, Dr Hammond identified a lack of effective communication between health and social services officials, which resulted in failure to trigger a formal child protection investigation. One of the many sad facts of the case is that prior to Kennedy's murder, Dumfries and Galloway Council's social services department and health board were considered to work well together. In 1999, when he was Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care, I accompanied Iain Gray to a meeting with senior officials from social services and the health board and we were told that being

co-located was helping joint working. The meeting was held in the context of Dumfries and Galloway being a good example of joint working between health and social services. Sadly, it was later proved that locating senior managers in the same building did not mean that vital and effective communication was taking place.

Dr Hammond's report concentrated on the local issues surrounding this particular tragedy. In February 2001, the various agencies published their responses, which included specific departmental and interdepartmental action plans to address her concerns.

Dr Hammond's report also noted some matters of national concern and made suggestions for consideration by the Scottish Executive. Among the matters of concern was the effect that isolation from a major teaching centre could have on agencies in a rural area. Dr Hammond also noted the effect of unrealistic work loads on key professionals and suggested the establishment of a national centre for child protection. I am pleased that we have heard from the minister that the Executive has followed through the national review and audit and that progress is being made; that is much to be welcomed. I say to Mr Martin, however, that we are in the second year of the reform of children's services and not the first.

We need to recognise that there are significant challenges in achieving the improvements that we desire. The children's social work statistics for the year ending March 2003 show a 13 per cent increase in the number of children on local child protection registers compared with the previous year, and a 12 per cent increase in referrals for child protection inquiries. Those increases might represent an increase in awareness, which is all to the good as long as the cases are followed up. However, staff vacancies over the same period increased by one third and that adds considerable stress to the system. In Dumfries and Galloway, we have a lower than average number of social workers per head of population and, oddly enough, a lower percentage of vacancies—a contradiction that I have flagged up to the responsible director on the council. From my case load, I am acutely aware of the local shortage of social workers and the pressures that that puts on those who are in post.

Mike Rumbles described how competition between local authority areas when bidding for staff makes matters worse. The British Association of Social Workers has expressed its concerns that the welcome measures that are being taken by the Executive to try to increase the numbers of social workers might not fully bear fruit for four years.

Had Kennedy McFarlane's murder been prevented, she would now be six years and eight months old and in her second year of primary

school. The investigations that were caused by her tragedy have continued now for a longer period than her short life. Some 18 months after her death, 11-week-old Caleb Ness was murdered by his father. That was a year after Dr Hammond's report. Five-year-old Danielle Reid's body was found this year in the Caledonian canal. I am pleased that ministers have accelerated the development of their responses to the review and audit in response to those further tragedies. I welcome the increased pace of reform.

On 11 October this year, *The Scotsman* newspaper noted that, according to the national criminal intelligence service, babies under one year old are at greater risk of being murdered than any other group. Children are most often at risk from the very people who would be expected to afford them the maximum protection—the people who brought them into the world and their partners. Those children look to the child protection agencies and to us, the legislators, to defend them. We owe it to the memory of Kennedy McFarlane, Caleb Ness, Danielle Reid and the others who have died in similar dreadful circumstances to prevent the fate that befell them befalling other children.

11:17

Alasdair Morgan (South of Scotland) (SNP): I will give some of my impressions of social work as a result of living with a child and family social worker for many years—I should say that I married her.

Social workers are underpaid by comparison with other similarly qualified professionals, although that is not their most serious concern. Pay alone would not cure the shortage problems; one has only to look at the shortages of general practitioners and dentists to realise that. More important, social workers are undervalued by society in general and they end up being the whipping boy for society's failures. As has been pointed out, it is not social workers who commit child murder, which is the subject of all the cases that we have discussed. As a result of staff feeling undervalued, there is often low morale and an increasingly high turnover of staff in social work departments.

Most important, social workers are overworked and they have huge case loads. Many cases do not get dealt with because they are not the most important ones; there is time to deal with only the most urgent cases. In that context, there are 35 recommendations in the Caleb Ness report, eight of which would lead to increased work for social workers. That increases the problem.

Social workers are overburdened with paperwork and reports and much of the paperwork

and procedures have been created as a result of legislation that was introduced following previous tragedies. We must ask ourselves whether the balance between procedure and action is correct. As has been mentioned, more people are now trying to cover their backs because they know that they will be blamed if something goes wrong. That is particularly problematic with regard to the assessment of risk, which, by definition, is not directly quantifiable and is often a matter of subjective judgment.

The other impression that I have formed is that, over a period of perhaps 20 years, problems and pressures have worsened. Things are deteriorating rather than improving.

In his opening speech, the minister acknowledged the importance of numbers and discussed breakdowns of communication between the various services. Of course, the two matters are interrelated. If a person is overworked, communication is yet another task that they must prioritise along with other things. If they must communicate about case A or do something about case B, they cannot do both things at once and often something will fall down the crack. Bearing in mind the need for information sharing, which was discussed earlier, the problem that could arise from too much information being passed around should be considered—I think that Scott Barrie mentioned that problem. The amount of information that is passed around in itself increases work loads. The more information that a person has, the more chance there is that they might miss out the one vital piece of information that could lead to something important being done.

I want to consider one conclusion of the Caleb Ness report, on which Mary Scanlon and Scott Barrie commented. There was an unspoken assumption that the parents had the right to care for their baby. That assumption dominated events to the extent that Caleb's right to a safe and secure upbringing was never the focus of decision making. I understand that matter on the surface, but am unclear about what it means in practice. As Scott Barrie said, parents have such a right, unless legal steps are taken to change it in accordance with legislation. If it is decided that a child's rights mean that the child's parents should not exercise their rights, either temporarily or permanently, at least two points arise. First, the procedural and legal hurdles that are involved in removing the child are often immense and time-consuming and put even more pressure on social workers. Secondly, in most areas, there is a severe lack of alternative carers to whom children can be given if it has been decided to remove them from their parents.

Scott Barrie: Does the member agree that one difficulty in removing children relates to the much

more difficult procedures that were introduced by the legislation that Lord James Douglas-Hamilton piloted through Westminster? That legislation introduced into child protection cases a court procedure before the children's hearings system was reached. Such a procedure had not been there previously.

Alasdair Morgan: I agree. One problem is that far more preparation and a much higher level of justification are needed to hold the action in front of a sheriff, as opposed to in front of a children's panel reporter, and that makes the process more difficult and timeconsuming.

I make a plea for a consistent approach from the Executive in dealing with the problem. I have with me two contrasting press releases. One, which is very hard, is from 18 February 2003, at the time of the child protection conference. It is headed

"Final warning for failing child protectors"

and that

"If the child protection system continues to fail",

immediate action should be taken. It talks about the need to "tackle poor performance locally".

On 29 June 2003, there was a much softer press release—from the minister, I think—that talked about "developing a Children's Charter", "building on proposals", and the need to "encourage better joined-up working" and "provide greater assurance". It quotes the Minister for Education and Young People, who said:

"there can be no quick fix."

That is a more consensual and favourable approach towards solving the problem. Social workers would be more encouraged if there was consistency of rhetoric from the Government.

11:24

Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab): I rise to support the motion in the name of Peter Peacock and to congratulate our Labour-Liberal coalition on its determination to grapple with the issues.

When we consider policy, we must consider resources. I am pleased to note from ministers' reports that the provision of resources and the political drivers are being put in place by the coalition. I am particularly pleased that there is a Cabinet delivery group for children and young people—I welcome that. I am also pleased that funding is being increased annually, from £19 million to £35 million in 2004-05, rising to £50 million in 2005-06. For looked-after children, an allocation of £30 million over three years has been set aside. Seeing such resources being put in place gives us confidence that resources are being made available to match the policy that the Executive is keen to develop. I am also pleased

that the children's commissioner will be in post by February next year, which is encouraging.

However, like all members, I am deeply saddened and extremely concerned when, in spite of our best efforts, inquiries and every ounce of determination by the professionals, there is yet more evidence of the system failing our children. We see such evidence from time to time and we have heard a roll-call of such cases this morning.

In measuring what our policies are achieving in Scotland, it is always valuable to get a perspective on how we are regarded elsewhere in the world and to learn lessons from abroad where possible. Earlier this year, I spoke to one of my friends in London. She is a highly regarded child care and family specialist lawyer and she told me that Scotland has a great deal to be proud of. She travels the world and speaks at conferences throughout the world, so she is in a good position to make a judgment. She was born and bred in Sicily, but has worked for the best part of her life in London and she is regarded as a specialist. This year, she came from London to learn more from leading child care specialists in Scotland, which says something about the system in Scotland.

I commend to colleagues a report on a seminar that was held in 2002 on international perspectives on child protection. There are many lessons to consider from that report, which enables us to measure this country's performance against the performance and policies of other countries. Naturally, as a result of countries' different histories and cultures, it is not always possible to transpose what might work in one country to another country, but one key lesson from the report is that, whatever the policy framework, the system must be supportive and flexible in relation to the anxieties that are faced by workers at the sharp end. The report also states that no international system is free from flaws.

A key point that emerges from the international perspective is that a judgment that is made that a system is not working can often result more from the dearth of support services than from the workings of the system itself. Shortages and work overloads in Scotland were mentioned in the report in respect of health visitors, reporters and forensic psychiatric places. The lack of staff is said to have diluted some services, while the channelling of money into special projects has starved some mainstream services.

The report, which highlights many comparative studies involving countries such as France, Belgium, Australia, the United Kingdom and Canada, is valuable because it provides detailed and worthwhile analysis of all the systems, policies and practices. It reflects a real determination on the part of our professionals to improve the care and protection of our children.

I want to say one more thing that people should take on board. We must, above all, do our utmost to support our professionals. Only last night, I was with a psychologist friend who told me that a social worker whom she knew disliked being introduced as a social worker. We must encourage social workers and other professionals to feel valued and to have a feeling of self-worth. All members have a duty to do so.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I apologise to two members whom I have been unable to call. We must proceed to closing speeches. As ever on Thursday mornings, time is tight.

11:28

Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP): The debate has been unique because there has been real consensus. As a result, I appeal to the Executive to examine the wording of all the amendments. I find myself in the unique position of supporting the Conservative amendment. I do not support it as a result of what has been said in the debate, and I do not agree that there should be complete integration of the NHS and social work budgets, but that subject does not appear in the Conservative amendment. That amendment calls for greater co-operation and collaboration, which are obviously worthy of support.

Similarly, the SNP amendment attempts to emphasise the Executive's role in staff training, retention and recruitment. I make no apology for the SSP amendment, which concentrates on one specific aspect of the overall problem—the recruitment, treatment and training of our social work staff.

Many members have referred to the number of people employed in social work. The Scottish Executive statistical bulletin that is available today makes the situation plain. It indicates that social care staff numbers were similar in 2002 to what they were in 2001, but that the level of vacancies increased by about a third. That suggests a 4 per cent increase in posts, mainly in fieldwork—that most essential element of social work. There is no room for complacency about the recruitment and retention of staff.

Mr Peacock will have received a letter last month from Mr Roberts, on behalf of a Glasgow children's panel. That letter warns about the shortage of social work staff and the inability of the children's panel service to work properly because of that staffing crisis. The letter states that provision

"in the last year has worsened rather than improved".

The letter also states that the failures

"totally undermine the hearings system and make it meaningless. If children are not seen by social workers,

then they are falling through the net. The situation is worse than having no system at all, because it brings the system into disrepute."

That letter was given to the minister on 20 October. The problem is that it follows on from a letter to the previous minister, Cathy Jamieson, last November. The previous letter from the children's panel states:

"Many children were not allocated a social worker, meaning that 'social work plans are not followed or, even worse, there is no plan.'"

Many children go a full year without being allocated a social worker. We must recognise that there is a real crisis in the recruitment and retention of social work staff, particularly in child care.

I was drawn to the evidence given by John Stevenson, the branch secretary of the Unison City of Edinburgh branch, to the Caleb Ness inquiry. He gave evidence on behalf of the social workers, who are often the butt of the gutter press stories—they are often represented as the ones who are to blame for the problems.

We could do with showing some consistency, because many politicians in the chamber often have a go at social workers. Thankfully, members have not done so today, but let us hope that there is consistency in future and that we continue to show respect for the professionalism and compassion of those who work in social work. By the way, why would people want to work in social work? They get a raw deal in terms of wages, they are overworked and they are publicly criticised. Social workers deserve to be given extra credit.

I will finish with a set of examples that Mr Stevenson gave in his evidence. He talked about some of the real-life cases that his members deal with. Those cases include

"The baby with a fractured skull they rescued from a house on one of the twice-daily visits they were doing because they had sought, but had been refused, a place of safety order."

The social workers had sought a place of safety order but they were refused it so they took a chance, removed the child and discovered that the baby should have been removed as it had a fractured skull. If they had not removed the child and subsequently it had died, who would have been to blame?

Another example that he gave was

"The 3-year-old they took to hospital outwith procedures (and possibly the law) because they suspected injuries and found healing fractured ribs and limbs—if they had been wrong they would have faced disciplinary or even legal action—but because their hunch was right, all that was forgotten."

That is the case of a child who was removed on the basis of a professional hunch. Social workers

do not get the credit that they deserve for the hundreds of children that they save, day in, day out, from that type of abuse.

That is why I hope that there will be support for all the amendments in today's debate. If the Executive will not support them, I hope that it will clarify why it is not prepared to do that.

11:34

Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD): I am happy to support the motion and I agree that there is a lot to support in the amendments. I do not know how the divisions will work out.

I will act as a sweeper and emphasise some of the points that need more emphasis. The Executive and the Parliament are committed to having a children's commissioner. The person who fills that post will have an important part to play in improving the situation. He or she will not deal with individual cases, but will use the cases to develop policies and try to make improvements. That is an important step forward.

We have not dealt very well with runaways. Before the Parliament started, I pointed out the lack of facilities to encourage runaways to come back and the lack of provision to ensure that if they did not want to go straight home they could go to some sort of hostel where they would be looked after and eased back into the community. I still think that there is inadequate provision of that sort of service.

We could use the current emphasis on tackling antisocial behaviour to provide more resources to help families. Research shows that many of the problems that teenagers experience start earlier than the teens because there is a problem within the family. We must invest more in family support and use some of the antisocial behaviour budget to address that. That would also benefit the children who are the subject of the debate.

We all talk about interagency working, joined-up government and all that, but it is very difficult to make that happen, because it is a remarkably difficult task to make people co-operate. There is a danger that we will be a bit like the gentleman who was Saddam Hussein's press officer, who kept on saying how marvellously his troops were fighting when in fact they had all gone home. I am not suggesting that the social workers have all gone home. They do a very good job, as do health workers, the police and so on. However, getting those people to co-operate is difficult. We must monitor that carefully to ensure that it happens. We must address the situation in reality, not only in our rhetoric.

To support social workers we need not only to recruit more of them, but to recruit more care

workers, support workers and so on. That will help to deliver the whole team that creates a climate in which children are well looked after.

As other members have said, we must value social workers more. We must stand up against the bad aspects of the media that vilify social workers. In modern British—I fear even Scottish—society, the media set the agenda more than people like us do. We must have a bit of backbone on subjects such as this. Perhaps we could persuade some of the television companies to have soap operas in which a social worker is a Dixon of Dock Green-type hero who supports the local community.

We must fund adequately and consistently the organisations that deal with the sort of problems that we are discussing today. I do not know if I should confess it, but during some of the duller speeches I was concluding a letter to the minister pointing out that an organisation that provides one-to-one support for young people who are having difficulty at school, in their family, or whatever is about to close through lack of funding. There must be consistent funding of good organisations.

A specific point that has been drawn to my attention and which I took up with a minister very recently—I have not yet had a reply—is that, as I understand it, whereas men who hit their partners can get into trouble with the police, that is not the case in relation to large teenage youths who hit their mothers. We must protect families. We must help parents who need support to deal with their children; we should not sit around and blame them. We must also support teachers so that there can be more adequate discipline in schools, because that helps children who are being bullied to get on with their classes and learn better. The teaching profession needs more support from us.

The debate has been encouraging. I hope that lessons can be drawn by the Executive from the many good points that have been made.

11:39

Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con): The debate has been excellent. It has covered the relevant factors and there have been many good contributions. However, it is one thing to speak in this Parliament and give commitments in words, but it is another thing to deliver. I pick up on Mary Scanlon's comment that we do not want to be here again in two or three years' time, debating the same issues in the same tragic circumstances in which we have discussed them today. I am sure that that is the minister's intention. I welcome his motion and the fact that he is prepared to accept Mary Scanlon's comments.

However, I have a minor criticism to make of the wording of the Executive motion, which talks of a "sustainable programme of reform". What we need is a sustainable programme that achieves the aim. Reform comes not as a sustainable element, but as a necessity in providing an adequate, reliable and trusted service. In the same, unbiased way, I make a slight criticism of the Conservative amendment, which seeks "to encourage greater responsibility", when the phrase should be "to ensure greater responsibility". That must be the aim of the Parliament today.

The tragic death of Caleb Ness has been referred to throughout the debate, principally because of the excellent way in which Susan O'Brien went about her task. I pay tribute to my Tory councillor colleagues on the City of Edinburgh Council who insisted that that should be an independent review rather than an internal inquiry. That was important. The report highlights shortcomings in how such cases are dealt with by almost all the agencies that have responsibilities for the overall welfare of children whose parents have failed or are failing them.

Mary Scanlon made the point that this reflects the situation not only in the City of Edinburgh Council, but in every local authority in the country. The good reasons why that is the case have been explained today, and are actually covered in the amendments from the SNP and the Scottish socialists: reference the low availability of people and resources to social work departments. Every local authority should be well aware of the contents of the report and should take heed of it. My colleague, Margaret Mitchell, made the point that the report's identification of shortcomings is not intended to be part of some blame culture; rather, it is intended to highlight lessons to be learned for the future.

I believe that, first and foremost, the fundamental responsibility for children lies with their parents. When the parents fail, all the agencies, health authorities, schools, the police and the judiciary have responsibility for the care of the children. That responsibility goes even further,

as the minister suggested, to neighbours and others who also have a role to play. We must take those aspects on board in trying to promote the objectives that are set out in the O'Brien report. Nevertheless, under the widely acclaimed Children (Scotland) Act 1995, the duties are placed on the local authorities. We have to put the main responsibility on someone, and I believe that, at the present time, social work services have to accept that responsibility.

There are several key elements of the O'Brien report that have to be addressed. Scott Barrie took exception to a comment about the presumption that natural parents are best placed to look after their offspring. However, that is what Susan O'Brien said in her report. I suggest that there is an underused facility that should be considered when social work services are looking for the ongoing care of children. I am talking about grandparents, to whom Rosemary Byrne referred earlier. A problem that is often faced by grandparents is the fact that no financial support is given to many of them by local authorities throughout the country. That is a situation that ministers should address. A flexible arrangement exists that gives local authorities an element of choice, but it is not used to any great extent.

I feel that my views and those of other members reflect each other; therefore, I will not continue further.

11:44

Shona Robison (Dundee East) (SNP): This has been an important debate in which there has been much consensus, as members have remarked. There have been many good speeches, and I apologise for not being able to refer to them all.

We must remember the hard work that social workers carry out. Theirs is a thankless task in many instances, as was ably illustrated by Alasdair Morgan. We must give social work staff the resources and support to enable them do the job properly. As Tommy Sheridan said, on a day-to-day basis children are protected, their lives are saved and the quality of their lives is enhanced. We should remember that. But—and it is a big but—we must also make it clear that, when practices are not as good as they should be, action will be taken to address them. Above all other considerations, the interests and welfare of the child must be paramount.

In his opening statement, Peter Peacock talked about child social work being a complex area of work—which is correct—and said that it is everybody's job to protect children. He also acknowledged the fact that the case of Caleb Ness revealed severe failings on the part of

several people, not just the social workers who were involved, that it was not an isolated case and that the key issue was better communication. I welcome the programme of reform, which seeks to address a number of issues by improving communication, providing clearer leadership and putting the interests of the child first.

The move towards a multi-agency inspection system is also to be welcomed. The key issue in the case of Caleb Ness was the fact that agreed procedures were not followed. I do not think that resources were the issue; the issue was communication. Lessons must be learned from that.

Fiona Hyslop talked about there being too much crisis management. Her point was well made. In addition to focusing on the children who are on the child protection register, we must focus on the children who are not on the register and who may not even explicitly be at risk but who—without the work that is going on with their families and if early intervention does not take place—may end up in that situation.

I remember from my experience, not as a social worker but as someone who was involved in the home care side of things, that, all too often, because of the limitation of resources, resources were allocated only to cases in which there was an imminent risk to the child. Many other children faced an element of risk—that is what I thought, and others agreed—but it was not of a high enough level to attract the limited resources. I suggest that, if enough work goes on with such families at an early stage, a lot of later crisis intervention can be avoided. We need to address that, and it brings us back to the issue of resources. Let us not focus on meeting the resource needs only of children who are on the child protection register and those who are at risk, although we must do that; let us look beyond that to ensure that the resources exist for work with all the children and families who are identified as requiring support.

The important issue of drug abuse has been highlighted by several members. We cannot address this issue in isolation; we must ensure that the surrounding services are also resourced and that there are adequate drug rehabilitation services to ensure that people get the support that they require.

Too many issues were raised to go into in the time that I have, but I will summarise the main ones.

Vacancy levels and resources are key. There must be better communication between social work staff. As the Minister for Health and Community Care is present, I stress that the removal of criminal justice workers from the social

work team would be a mistake. We need to keep those workers together to ensure that there is good communication.

Similarly, there must be better communication between agencies. We need to consider whistle-blowing and the proposal that Children 1st made in that regard. We need to ensure that systems are robust. I do not know if they can be made failsafe, but they should be made as good as they can be.

We need to ensure that we all understand that children's welfare is the responsibility of every one of us and that the interests of the child are paramount.

11:50

The Minister for Health and Community Care (Malcolm Chisholm): This has been an excellent debate. The central message, as was the message of the audit and review, is that protecting children is everyone's business. The most vulnerable children have a right, like all other children, to be safe and secure. If our society is to protect children and prevent child abuse, we must work together across agencies and professional boundaries.

We have set up a reform programme, as described by Peter Peacock and others. A key part of that will be a multi-agency inspection process with measurable standards, which was welcomed by Mike Rumbles and others.

Recently, Peter Peacock, Cathy Jamieson and I have written to chief executives of local authorities, leaders of NHS boards and chief constables requiring statements of assurance that they have reviewed how their services act individually and jointly to protect children, that they are either satisfied or have identified areas for action and that they have robust quality assurance mechanisms in place.

Health has a vital role to play in this area and I will deal with that as well as respond to points that have been made.

Fiona Hyslop and Robin Harper talked about the helpline proposal from Children 1st. We already support helplines—ChildLine and ParentLine in particular—and have made additional resources available to them. However, we are considering the Children 1st proposal and will respond in due course.

While welcoming the reform programme, Mary Scanlon asked how it would be monitored and reviewed. Key to that will be the inspection of services and we will announce proposals for that in the new year, based on the national standards that will focus on outcomes for children.

Margaret Mitchell asked about new offences and

sentences in England with respect to internet-related activity. I am advised that we already have stringent legal recourse in Scotland in many of those areas but I will ask officials to examine the comparisons that were made and to write to Mrs Mitchell.

Health has a vital role to play and the Caleb Ness inquiry report highlighted several areas for improvement. Those areas are consistent with the findings of the national audit and review of child protection and other inquiries into child deaths. In particular, action is required to address accountability and leadership, communication and information sharing and staff training.

We will continue to value and support staff, as Mary Scanlon said we should, but we will do so within a proper culture of accountability. The Caleb Ness inquiry found a lack of clear responsibility for child protection at various levels within the NHS. We will require chief executives of NHS boards to ensure that there are unambiguous lines of accountability and responsibility for child protection in their organisations. As part of that process, we will ask chief executives to contribute to the current review of the role and remit of child protection committees and to consider how best to include senior health representation in relation to multi-agency work so that regular reports can be made to NHS boards.

Communication is critical, both inside individual agencies and across professional and organisational boundaries, as Scott Barrie emphasised. Effective information sharing among the relevant professionals is crucial to protecting children. Although confidentiality is important, agencies must not hide behind it inappropriately, as the focus must always be on the welfare of the child.

Guidance to health professionals in relation to protecting children is unequivocal. For example, the General Medical Council has already advised doctors that information must be disclosed to an appropriate agency or person where the health professional believes a patient to be a victim of neglect, or physical or sexual abuse. Because we know that this remains an area of concern for many staff, the Scottish Executive is about to issue a short good-practice guide on sharing information about children at risk. It is designed to help staff approach this complex area with greater clarity and confidence.

Sharing information can also be assisted by appropriate information technology systems. The children's services stream of the e-care programme, part of our modernising government programme, is running pilot projects that include the development of an integrated children's services record and the identification of core data for a shared assessment framework. The

protection of children at risk is a key driver.

Fiona Hyslop: If the assurances that the minister seeks from various authorities are not provided by the time that the minister holds next spring's conference, would he be prepared to examine the powers that the social work services inspectorate has?

Secondly, on the issue of having someone on health boards who is responsible for child protection services, my understanding is that they should already have been appointed.

Malcolm Chisholm: We are already examining the inspectorate's powers. There is a requirement on those agencies to take action. If they have not taken action, we will ensure that they do.

On the second point, some of these actions ought to have been taken already and, while much progress has been made, far more needs to be done. I will say more about what we are going to do in the very near future to ensure that that happens.

Training is a key area. The Caleb Ness inquiry reinforced the importance of effective training in child protection for staff at all levels in organisations, including those who are not directly involved in caring for children. We will take up those issues with chief executives and chairs of NHS boards to ensure that NHS staff participate effectively in child protection training so that they have a clear understanding of when and how to share information and what to do with it and are fully aware of their individual and corporate responsibilities for protecting children.

Janis Hughes praised the work of NHS Greater Glasgow. I join her in that and point out that we have recently provided pump-priming funding for a managed clinical network for child protection in the west of Scotland. That arrangement will improve access to specialist health child protection services for children at risk and will support staff training and the development of standards and quality assurance processes

In the next few weeks, we will be issuing guidance on child health surveillance, which is the programme of checks that tends to be undertaken by health visitors. The guidance will recommend that child health surveillance activity should be refocused to ensure that health visitors provide more intensive support to those families most in need.

At the next meeting of NHS board chairs later this month, child protection will be the major theme. I will be requiring NHS chairs to ensure that the boards give proper consideration to their responsibilities for child protection work and take account of the findings of recent inquiries. It will also be the main agenda item at the next meeting

of NHS board chief executives next week.

Fiona Hyslop and Rosemary Byrne raised concerns about parents with drug-use problems. That is a growing social phenomenon that we should all be concerned about. Obviously, some action has been taken in relation to support services being strengthened. The new surveillance that I referred to will be relevant in that regard. We are actively reviewing the findings of the recently published report "Hidden Harm", which deals with the needs of children whose parents abuse drugs, to see what further action needs to be taken, including by the child protection reform team. That is an important piece of work.

Robin Harper said that there was no standard in respect of seeing children on supervision. I assure him that we will issue guidance on that in the near future and that we have already given a commitment to that effect.

Campbell Martin said that social workers are walking away from their jobs. I could say a lot about recruitment, but not in the time I have left. The fact is that there are more social workers now than at any time, notwithstanding the difficulties of the profession. We know that the job can be stressful and, today, we are launching an initiative to support frontline staff.

The national audit and review of child protection showed that we must take action. We have shown the progress that we have already made in the reform programme and I have also outlined the important steps being taken within the NHS to ensure that the findings of the recent report into the tragic death of Caleb Ness are taken on board and acted on.

We look forward to receiving the support of members in delivering a tough programme of reform that will truly improve children's lives.

First Minister's Question Time

12:00

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): I ask members to join me in warmly welcoming to Parliament members of the Palestinian Legislative Council and their chief clerk.

Prime Minister (Meetings)

1. Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP): To ask the First Minister when he next plans to meet the Prime Minister and what issues he intends to raise. (S2F-336)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): I plan to meet the Prime Minister on at least two occasions between now and Christmas and I am sure that at those meetings we will discuss a number of important issues for Scotland.

Mr Swinney: The First Minister said in March this year that he was opposed to compulsory identity cards. In the light of the Home Secretary's announcement this week, is that still the Scottish Executive's position?

The First Minister: The position of the Executive and the partnership has consistently been that we would be opposed to the use of compulsory identity cards for services that come under our devolved responsibilities in Scotland. That remains our position and not only have we agreed and properly implemented that position, but the Home Secretary and the United Kingdom Cabinet have accepted it in full. It forms an integral part of the UK Cabinet's scheme, as it has no intention whatever of using its card for any devolved services.

Mr Swinney: The First Minister had better clarify exactly what the Scottish Executive's position happens to be.

Members: He just did.

Mr Swinney: Oh no: there is massive uncertainty in what the First Minister has just said. On 27—[*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Order.

Mr Swinney: I do not know whether members of the Executive parties are interested in listening to what I have to say, Presiding Officer, but on 27 March, Pauline McNeill asked the First Minister:

"Will he assure me that all our citizens, including asylum seekers, will not be forced to carry any card that might be seen as an identity card?"

The First Minister replied:

"I am not in favour of compulsion."—[*Official Report*, 27 March 2003; c 20113.]

On Tuesday, the Home Secretary said:

"the Government have accepted the principle ... and we are clear that to achieve the full effect ... we would have to move to compulsion."—[*Official Report, House of Commons*, 11 November 2003; Vol 413, c 179.]

In March, the First Minister said no to compulsion and on Tuesday, the Home Secretary said yes, so will the First Minister now tell Parliament clearly and specifically whether he is in principle opposed to compulsory identity cards?

The First Minister: As I have said, the position in the Executive and the partnership parties that form it has been absolutely consistent: we have consistently advised the UK Government that our policy position is that any proposals for voluntary, compulsory or any other form of identity card system in the United Kingdom that might be used for any matter that comes under the United Kingdom Government's remit should not and will not be compulsory for use in relation to devolved services in Scotland. That will be the position for the whole of the next four years of the session, and it will be for the people of Scotland to decide in 2007 whether that position should change.

Mr Swinney: I will give the First Minister a quotation from what David Blunkett said in the House of Commons on Tuesday—[*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Order.

Mr Swinney: David Blunkett said:

"the Government have accepted the principle ... and we are clear that to achieve the full effect—on illegal working and the illegal use of free public services—we would have to move to compulsion."—[*Official Report, House of Commons*, 11 November 2003; Vol 413, c 179.]

If the First Minister is serious about his words that the British Government is to be told that there is no question of compulsory ID cards being used to access public services that are this Parliament's responsibility, will he place before the Parliament—before January, when the process starts in the UK Parliament—a motion that makes it clear that this Parliament is determined not to have identity cards in Scotland? Will he give us that commitment?

The First Minister: I am not interested in flag waving or symbols in the Parliament; I am interested in action and influencing the decisions that are made. That is precisely what Scottish ministers have done.

As I have explained twice now—and will try very hard to explain again—we have taken the consistent position that any ID cards introduced by the UK Government in any shape or form, whether voluntary, compulsory, partly compulsory or partly voluntary, in any year between now and 2007 would not, should not and will not be compulsory for use of services for which we have responsibility

in Scotland. Using our influence, we have had that position fully accepted by the UK Government. It has no problem with our position and, indeed, this week has stated again that that is the case. The situation could not be clearer and I hope that Mr Swinney will at some point accept that and move on.

Cabinet (Meetings)

2. David McLetchie (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con): To ask the First Minister what issues will be discussed at the next meeting of the Scottish Executive's Cabinet. (S2F-344)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): The Cabinet will discuss progress on the implementation of the partnership agreement and our legislative programme.

David McLetchie: I thank the First Minister for that answer. I am sure that the Cabinet will also want to congratulate him on his elevation to the post of president of Regleg, the conference of devolved Administrations within the European Union. *[Applause.]*

This week, in the course of his grand tour of Europe, the First Minister did a radio interview for "Good Morning Scotland" in which he claimed—and I quote him accurately—that there were

"thriving fishing communities in many parts of Scotland".

Will he name some of them? *[Laughter.]*

The First Minister: The Conservatives might find that funny, but my remark was very serious. If Mr McLetchie took the opportunity to visit certain parts of Scotland, he would find not only that we have a very strong and successful shellfish industry in large parts of the north-west and in other parts of the country, but that the industry is growing and is competing well in international markets.

Mr McLetchie should also study the scientific research that was published just last month. He would find that, although we might have a case to make about how we want some of that research to be interpreted at the European fisheries council meeting in December, it confirms that stocks, and therefore parts of the industry, are recovering. In fact, stocks are stronger than they were a year ago. It is not the case that the whole Scottish fishing industry is in crisis, disarray or serious trouble. Parts of it are extremely strong and are competing both at home and abroad. We should be proud of those parts of the industry, rather than simply run them down.

David McLetchie: There was a distinct lack of specifics in that answer. Perhaps I could give the First Minister some basic information. Today, there are 605 fewer fishermen in Fraserburgh than there were in 1997; 250 fewer in Shetland; and 162

fewer in Peterhead. In fact, in Scotland as a whole—in virtually every port of registration—there are nearly 2,500 fewer fishermen today than there were in 1997.

It is the ultimate irony that the First Minister made his comments in landlocked Austria, which is a country that highlights the absurdity of the common fisheries policy. Fish might well be able to swim in the North sea but, unlike the First Minister, they cannot get to Salzburg. Instead of patronising our fishermen and telling them that they are doing terribly well when they are manifestly not, why does the First Minister not shake off his complacency and use his new position in Regleg to fight for our fishermen's interests and to lobby for the scrapping of the CFP, which has ensured that there are no "thriving fishing communities" in any part of Scotland today?

The First Minister: I will leave it to Alasdair Morrison and others to make the absolutely clear-cut case for those parts of the fishing industry in Scotland that are very successful at the moment and which can be and should be more successful in future.

Although Mr McLetchie's comment about fish going to Austria was flippant, I must say that our ambitions for our fishing industry should include ensuring that the fish that we process in Scotland go all over Europe. The issue is not just about the management of fish stocks in the sea, but about how the fish that are caught are processed and how we then export the product successfully on behalf of the Scottish fishing industry. The management of the stocks in the sea is only one part of the equation. We have a thriving fish-processing industry in large parts of Scotland and fish stocks that are recovering largely because of some of our actions.

The fish industry in parts of Scotland is still successful even though it is smaller than it was a few years ago. We should boost that industry by negotiating on its behalf and by ensuring that there is regional management of fisheries and that the new regional advisory councils that we were promised last year are properly implemented. We should also ensure that the Commission sees through its commitment to ensure that no new money is spent on new boats in Spain or elsewhere and that everyone throughout the European Union takes their fair share in the management of fish stocks. Those will be our objectives in December and I am confident that we will succeed.

Richard Lochhead (North East Scotland) (SNP): I believe that yesterday, as part of the First Minister's new role to which David McLetchie referred, he signed the declaration of Salzburg, which calls for Parliaments such as the Scottish

Parliament to have direct access to the European Court of Justice and for a reaffirmation that regional and devolved Governments can lead EU delegations on behalf of member states. Does the First Minister intend to pursue those two issues with the UK Government so that we can protect our fishing communities and give this Parliament some power to defend them?

The First Minister: We were centrally involved in the decision-making process that led to the commitment in the new draft EU constitution that will ensure that the Committee of the Regions, on behalf of devolved Administrations in Europe, can make representations to the European Court of Justice. That is a positive step and, if the measure is ever required, it could be used to good effect.

Mr Lochhead is well aware of the position on delegations, which is that United Kingdom delegations are led by the United Kingdom. The key point for us is to influence the UK position and to use the UK's power in the European Union, in which the larger countries now have more power, influence and strength. When we lead in discussions, in effect, we lead for Scotland and for the United Kingdom as a whole.

Irene Oldfather (Cunninghame South) (Lab): The First Minister will be aware of the proposal to set up a European agency to promote language learning. Will he use his new position to advance the case for any such agency to be based in Scotland? Does he believe that the use of new technology in language learning, such as that used in the innovative project in my area—which the First Minister has visited—would be helpful in establishing the case for any such agency to come to Scotland?

The First Minister: I am sure that the use of that technology would be helpful. We are always keen to attract public agencies whose powers go beyond our borders to locate in Scotland. While the location and establishment of such an agency in Scotland might help to improve language teaching and development here, we must ensure that we accept that responsibility and that we improve the number of people in Scotland who are fluent in more than one language. The projects in North Ayrshire Council and Argyll and Bute Council, which have worked successfully, use technology to twin classrooms in Scotland and to twin Scottish classrooms with classrooms in France and elsewhere. I am sure that that technology can be used in other areas, too.

Nursery Nurses

3. Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP): To ask the First Minister how often the Scottish Executive's Cabinet has discussed the on-going industrial action involving nursery nurses; how often the Executive has contacted the Convention

of Scottish Local Authorities in relation to that dispute; and what value it places on the contribution of nursery nurses to the early education and development of children. (S2F-348)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): Cabinet regularly discusses issues that are related to meeting our partnership agreement commitment to secure the highest standard of education for our children and young people. COSLA, the Scottish ministers and officials are in regular formal and informal contact on that and a range of other issues. We do not hold central records of how many contacts are made in relation to any specific issue. We recognise the important contribution made by all early-years and child care workers. However, it is extremely regrettable that industrial action is being taken by nursery nurses across Scotland, and I urge all those involved to continue with or to resume negotiations to reach a settlement.

Tommy Sheridan: The First Minister suggests that nursery nurses should continue negotiations. As he well knows, nursery nurses are responsible for the crucial early-years education, development and care of Scotland's children, but their jobs or salaries have not been reviewed for 15 years. They lodged a salary claim three years ago, but COSLA has ignored it, which gives them no alternative but to take action.

Does Mr McConnell not think that it is time that he, as First Minister of Scotland, got off the fence on the issue and stated categorically that Scotland's nursery nurses are worth more than the £10,000 to £13,000 a year that they are currently paid?

The First Minister: I do not have any doubt at all that Scotland's nursery nurses are worth more than the money that they are currently paid, which is why we have supported an increased offer to them and why we have not only consistently funded more child care and early-years workers, but have ensured that they are better paid, too.

However, responsibility for the negotiations and the pay and conditions of nursery nurses in Scotland lies with local authorities, the nursery nurses and their trade union representatives. They should be meeting and discussing a settlement, not using strike action in a way that affects the education of youngsters. I hope that that message can be taken out of the chamber. It is vital that we reach a settlement to the dispute as quickly as possible and that we put the interests of the children first.

Tommy Sheridan: I do not know whether the First Minister listened to the last point that I made. The nursery nurses have tried negotiation. They have held meetings and demonstrations and have organised marches and petitions. They have been

ignored by their employers.

The First Minister thinks that the nursery nurses are worth more than what they are being paid now. During the debate on the issue in September, one of the First Minister's colleagues, Margaret Jamieson, said:

"We now need the minister to ensure that there is one Scottish grade, one Scottish career structure and one Scottish salary scale for those who deliver a valued start in education to our children".—[*Official Report*, 24 September 2003; c 2032.]

The First Minister's colleagues believe that there is a role for him to intervene. Why will he not intervene on behalf of a group of low-paid women workers who need his assistance?

The First Minister: Because, as I have said over the past 12 months in relation to rail, fire and other industrial disputes, I do not believe that we as a Government should intervene in negotiations that either are or should be taking place between employers and union representatives. In this case, the union representatives and the councils, whether at national or local level, should be sitting round the table, discussing settlements and putting the interests of the children first.

Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): Does the First Minister agree that a central and welcome element in the tackling of poverty and exclusion in our communities has been the willingness of the Labour Government and the Scottish Executive to invest in child care and pre-school education? Does he agree that, as a consequence, the sector has expanded, putting increased burdens, responsibilities and training demands on the people—predominantly women—who work in the sector?

I accept the obvious position that it is the responsibility of COSLA and the trade unions to negotiate a settlement to the dispute, but does the First Minister agree that there is a compelling case for a full review of the sector, which, in my view, would reveal the sharp contrast between the level of responsibility that is being placed on the sector and the level of pay that is awarded? Will the First Minister consider how such a review might be established?

The First Minister: I understand the passion with which Johann Lamont makes her remarks, but we have no plans at the moment for such a review. As for the present dispute, it is important for the immediate future that the negotiations take place, that settlements are reached and that those who work in and manage the sector can move on from the current position.

Glasgow (City Vision)

4. Bill Butler (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab): To ask the First Minister what steps are being taken to support the city of Glasgow in achieving its city vision. (S2F-341)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): A successful, thriving Glasgow is critical to the success of the west of Scotland and of Scotland as a whole. It is essential that central Government, local government, agencies and the private and voluntary sectors work together in partnership, not only for economic prosperity, but to tackle the severe social problems that still exist in parts of the city.

We whole-heartedly endorse Glasgow's city vision, which has been drawn up in partnership between Glasgow City Council and its neighbouring local authorities, with support from the city growth fund. We are backing our commitment to Glasgow by supporting and funding the completion of the central Scotland motorway network, the airport rail link, the modernisation of Glasgow's public housing, the renewal of school buildings in the city and so many other developments.

Bill Butler: All the measures that the First Minister mentioned are welcome. They reflect the great need for investment and partnership working that must be met if Glasgow's deep-seated economic and social problems are to be tackled correctly.

The First Minister will agree that this week's announcement of £126 million of investment in the development of the Clyde waterfront represents a great opportunity to create perhaps up to 25,000 jobs in Glasgow. However, as he knows, if the still unacceptably high number of Glaswegians who are unemployed long term, especially in areas such as Drumchapel and Yoker in my constituency of Anniesland, are to benefit from a growing Glasgow economy, appropriate skills training is paramount. Will the First Minister tell the chamber what action the Executive is taking further to develop skills training and other support to enable jobless Glaswegians to access new job opportunities?

The First Minister: We welcome in general terms the plans to develop the Clyde waterfront. There is no doubt that the River Clyde is a national asset and should be used more constructively, for the long-term economic benefit not just of Glasgow but of the whole of the west of Scotland. However, we must also ensure that the appropriate skills are available in the Glasgow area to enable people to take up the job opportunities that might result from that or other projects.

There are two issues for us to address. The first is the skills that may be developed in younger people. That is why Glasgow City Council has been pioneering in ensuring that youngsters in schools have more access to vocational options and other opportunities through pilot projects. The council is now looking to spread those opportunities across the city.

Secondly, I think that I am right when I say that Glasgow remains the worst location in the whole United Kingdom in terms of the number of people who are economically inactive as a result of long-term unemployment or sickness. That is a serious challenge, both for the UK Government and for the Scottish Executive. That is why there are plans to pilot in Glasgow a scheme that will allow flexibility in the benefits system and provide people with an easier transition into work. That is exactly the sort of idea that we need to pursue if we are to meet the social challenges that exist, especially in the east end of Glasgow.

Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con): Does the First Minister agree that progress on such matters is prejudiced by the apparently poisoned relationship between the Executive and Glasgow City Council? Does he accept the recent criticism of the Executive's attitude to Glasgow by Councillor Charles Gordon, the leader of the council?

The First Minister: The evidence is in the detail. We have the most comprehensive package for a long time of investments in public services and economic projects to benefit the city of Glasgow. The examples that I gave in my answer to Bill Butler's original question—the largest housing modernisation project in the whole of Europe, the largest school modernisation project in the whole of Britain and long-overdue investment in the motorway network and rail links, which will now happen in Glasgow—show what an excellent relationship ministers in the Scottish Executive have with Glasgow City Council and other partners.

Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): Does the First Minister support the view of the chairman of the Strathclyde Passenger Transport Authority that trends showing an increase in transport and traffic in Glasgow will soon require as part of the city vision a second Clyde crossing, including public transport provision, somewhere in the vicinity of the Clyde tunnel? Such a crossing is particularly necessary in the light of the proposed centralisation of hospital services at the Southern general hospital. Will the Scottish Executive support such a proposal as a matter of urgency?

The First Minister: As I have stated in response to earlier questions, we are supporting a number of projects. The immediate priorities are to secure and complete the motorway network in the west of Scotland and to secure the Glasgow airport rail

link, which is fundamentally important for the city, for the west of Scotland as a whole and for Glasgow airport. As those projects get under way, we will have to consider what projects should come next on the priority list. I hear the case for a second Clyde tunnel, but I also hear the case for a crossrail scheme in the city and for a number of other projects that also appear to have high priority. Choices will have to be made.

Whisky Industry

5. Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): To ask the First Minister what action is being taken to support the Scotch single malt whisky industry. (S2F-339)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): Scotland's whisky industry makes an enormous contribution to the economies of Scotland and the United Kingdom, and the Scotch single malt in particular is a prestige product that contributes to Scotland's international image and reputation. The industry supports more than 50,000 jobs in Scotland alone and is the UK's fifth largest export earner. Specifically we support the industry by helping to promote it abroad through Scottish Development International and by investing in innovation to increase productivity, as I experienced during my recent visit to Edrington's plant in Glasgow, which now has the fastest whisky-bottling line in the world, I believe. That was partly funded by a grant given under our new arrangements for regional selective assistance to boost Scottish jobs and a great Scottish company.

Mary Scanlon: I thank the First Minister for that enthusiastic reply. Does he agree that a single malt, such as Cardhu, is unique and quite different from a combination of selected malt whiskies, even if they are from the same area? Does he agree that a blend of malt whiskies should be clearly labelled as such so that changes to the product are fully understood by the trade and customers alike?

The First Minister: The Scotch Whisky Association does an excellent job in representing the industry and in ensuring that it works cohesively to maintain the international reputation of Scotch and that the highest standards are always applied to the production and marketing of Scotch whisky. As part of that, it is important that the way in which the product is described is crystal clear. I hope that any current issues can be dealt with properly by the Scotch Whisky Association in consultation with the companies involved, and that they ensure that whatever happens at the end of those discussions, the world-wide reputation of the industry remains high.

Mrs Margaret Ewing (Moray) (SNP): Does the First Minister agree that if any litigation was to arise due to the immediate problems at Cardhu

and other aspects of the whisky industry, there could be massive repercussions for the Scotch whisky industry and the reputation about which he spoke could be severely damaged? He obviously agrees that there should be discussions within the Scotch Whisky Association, as various options are being proposed by all parts of the industry. To that effect, will he make a point of meeting the Scotch Whisky Association either before or after its council on 4 December when those options will be discussed? Will he give a commitment that, if necessary, he will propose legislation to change the Scotch Whisky Act 1988 and its subsequent orders? Will he also discuss with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs some of the European directives that impact on the labelling of Scotch?

The First Minister: I urge caution; we must tread carefully and get the right balance between resolving the current issue and maintaining the reputation of the industry at home and abroad. The industry operates in a competitive environment. It is doing very well, but it needs to maintain its competitive position.

The Scotch Whisky Association has a key role in ensuring that the right standards are met throughout the industry. My office has, of course, been in contact with the Scotch Whisky Association as a result of recent developments and it will continue to be so until the issues are resolved. I have spoken to some of the participants in the current discussions and I believe that there will be a resolution. I do not believe that we should do anything in the meantime that might add to the possible difficulties with the reputation of the Scotch whisky industry. We should support the association and the industry in maintaining standards and in solving the current difficulty.

Schools (Performance Information)

6. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West): To ask the First Minister what changes the Scottish Executive proposes regarding public information about the performance of schools. (S2F-345)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): Ministers are committed to providing more and better information for parents about how their child's school is performing. From next month, we will publish information on performance against the national priorities, exam results, school-leaver destinations, and attendance and absence rates. In total, that will be the most comprehensive and comprehensible package of information for parents on individual schools ever made available in Scotland.

Dennis Canavan: Is the First Minister aware that, in Wales and Northern Ireland, national sets of data relating to examination results are no

longer produced, and that in England additional information, including value-added data, is published to give a more accurate assessment of how schools perform in raising pupils' attainments?

Why is it taking the Scottish Executive so long to implement a similar practice, given that a commitment to do so was made more than five years ago, when Helen Liddell was Minister for Education at the Scottish Office?

The First Minister: Because there have been more important priorities in the meantime. If Mr Canavan recalls, there was a substantial difficulty in the education sector in Scotland when the national negotiating machinery completely broke down three or four years ago. The conditions of service—the most detailed and prescriptive conditions of service for any group of public sector workers anywhere in Europe—became far too cumbersome and required radical modernisation. There were also escalating problems of indiscipline and, in some cases, violence in our schools. Those problems required action through a series of new measures and policies. Furthermore, our exam system fell into utter chaos and had to be sorted out so that its credibility at home and abroad could be renewed.

This Executive tackled those and other issues as priorities. Successive ministers with responsibility for education were right to do that, and the Executive is right now to resolve the issue of providing information for parents and others on individual schools. We will do that. We will continue to publish exam results, but we will do so with other added-value information. Mr Peacock is working on that and he will make an announcement soon.

12:31

Meeting suspended until 14:30.

14:30

On resuming—

Question Time

SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment Directive

1. Shiona Baird (North East Scotland) (Green): To ask the Scottish Executive what action it has taken to raise awareness amongst small and medium-sized companies of the implications of the forthcoming waste electrical and electronic equipment directive. (S2O-751)

The Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Ross Finnie): We have raised awareness of the directive in the electronics and waste industries through a range of meetings, seminars and discussions and by issuing a discussion paper, which was published in March 2003.

Shiona Baird: Is the minister aware that there is a great deal of discussion in England between the Department of Trade and Industry and local authorities on providing a separate collection for discarded white goods, which would allow white goods to be reused rather than landfilled, and that funding is being considered to enable local authorities to fund such facilities? Will the Executive consider a similar scheme to allow white goods to be reused, particularly by community groups that are crying out for those goods, rather than their continuing to be dumped in landfill sites?

Ross Finnie: As Shiona Baird is well aware, the whole purpose of the directive is to ensure that by placing a real obligation on both the manufacturer and the importer of the goods, they take those goods back. The intention is to place the obligation on them to reuse and recycle, so the whole purpose of the directive is to obviate the question of increasing landfill.

In Scotland, we are having discussions with local authorities to ensure that, in framing our own regulation, we do not exclude the voluntary sector, which, as Shiona Baird rightly says, has been making use of such goods in a valuable way by reusing them for the benefit of their communities. We have not been talking to local authorities about particular facilities, because we think that, at this stage, the real targets of our effort should be the manufacturers and the distributors, which are, after all, the intended victims of the directive.

Alasdair Morgan (South of Scotland) (SNP): Is the minister aware of the commercial opportunities that could result from the directive?

Is he familiar with the work of MIREC Asset Management in Dumfries, which recycles and refurbishes considerable amounts of telephone and other electronic and computer equipment? Will he consider visiting that firm to see for himself at first hand what can be achieved?

Ross Finnie: As was implicit in Shiona Baird's question and in my answer, reuse is a key element and something that will come much more into play as a consequence of the directive. I am aware of the work of that company. I have not visited it, but I would be delighted to try to fit it into my diary of engagements.

Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (Meetings)

2. Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive when it will next meet the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and what issues will be discussed. (S2O-750)

The Minister for Finance and Public Services (Mr Andy Kerr): We meet regularly with the convention to discuss issues relevant to local government. My next meeting with the convention is on 27 November.

Mr Monteith: I hope that the state of Scotland's local roads will be on the agenda. According to research by the Automobile Association, some 13 councils spend less on their local roads than is recommended by the minister's department. For instance, Stirling Council has spent some £5 million less in the past two years than he would have recommended. Does he share my concern about that?

Mr Kerr: Brian Monteith's question also reflects the fact that some councils spend more than the allocated grant-aided expenditure. Of course, GAE acts as guidance to councils on spending the resources that we allocate to them. It is quite right that, as local democratic organisations, councils have the right to make local decisions, and I hope that local citizens hold them to account for those local decisions.

Building Regulation Reform (Consultation)

3. Chris Ballance (South of Scotland) (Green): To ask the Scottish Executive what consultations there have been between its officials responsible for building regulation reform and those who have expertise in sustainable development, in particular Scottish Natural Heritage and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency. (S2O-755)

The Deputy Minister for Communities (Mrs Mary Mulligan): The consultations on the modernisation of the building standards system have involved a variety of bodies with expertise in

sustainable development, including the Scottish Environment Protection Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage. Indeed, the Transport and the Environment Committee of the previous session commended the inclusive approach taken by the Executive during the development of the Building (Scotland) Bill proposals last year.

Chris Ballance: The minister will no doubt be aware that by far the biggest stream of commercial waste comes from the construction industry and that waste minimisation is agreed to be a top priority in the waste management strategy. How will the next round of building regulations reduce that stream of waste?

Mrs Mulligan: The new regulations under the Building (Scotland) Act 2003 will support development that has lower impact on energy and water use and greater emphasis on reducing the amount of waste and greenhouse gas emissions. We are aware of the issue and we will continue to monitor the situation and react to it.

Sarah Boyack (Edinburgh Central) (Lab): In the minister's next review of building standards, will she explore how renewable energy and energy efficiency technologies, such as solar heating and combined heat and power systems, could enable Scottish householders to have warmer homes that they can afford to heat and which will not damage the environment?

Mrs Mulligan: The Executive is always examining ways of increasing energy efficiency in both residential and business properties. Sarah Boyack will be aware that there have been huge improvements in the development of solar heating in recent years. The Executive will consider that matter, particularly in the light of our implementation of the European Commission directive on the energy performance of buildings.

Primary Medical Services (Out-of-hours Cover)

4. Ms Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what extra resources will be made available to national health service boards following implementation of the new primary medical services contracts for out-of-hours general practitioner cover in those circumstances where not enough GPs register to work beyond contracted hours. (S2O-722)

The Minister for Health and Community Care (Malcolm Chisholm): To help NHS boards reprovide the service, the out-of-hours development fund will be increased from £6.3 million in 2003-04 to £10 million in 2005-06. In addition, GP practices that opt to transfer their out-of-hours responsibility to the board will have their global sum allocation reduced by 6 per cent, which will release further funds to assist boards with the costs of service reprovider.

Ms White: I thank the minister for his reply, but my question was in human rather than financial terms. Given that a substantial number of GPs say that they will opt out of the service, what services will be provided for people who reside in areas with acute shortages of GPs who take part in out-of-hours cover?

Malcolm Chisholm: We should not exaggerate the number of GPs who will opt out. The report of the out-of-hours development group, which was published this week, states that the indications are that between two thirds and three quarters of GPs will still want to work out of hours—they may not want to have responsibility for an out-of-hours service, but they will want to work out of hours. A survey in Glasgow indicated that the same proportion of GPs will want to work out of hours in Glasgow as currently work for out-of-hours co-operatives in Glasgow. We should not exaggerate the extent to which doctors will withdraw from the service.

Redesigned services can be developed. That is another major feature of the report of the out-of-hours development group that was produced this week. I have given examples of such services before at question time, such as that provided by the paramedics whom I met in Moray in the summer. That is one of many examples of services being provided differently. However, GPs will still be a key part of the system.

Mr David Davidson (North East Scotland) (Con): Many members have received letters from rural and remote GPs about the anticipated benefit for them from the Primary Medical Services (Scotland) Bill with regard to out-of-hours cover, holiday relief and a shorter working week. Will the minister assure that group of GPs that, from the date on which the bill is enacted, the out-of-hours service will be available through health boards to provide cover for those GPs? Has he identified the qualified medical staff whom health boards will be able to employ to allow them to provide that service?

Malcolm Chisholm: Before I answer that question, I reassure patients that under the patient services guarantee, all out-of-hours work will be carried out by accredited providers. That is another part of the agenda of developing standards. On GPs, I have said that, in exceptional circumstances, it may not be possible to transfer the service, but that in the vast majority of cases, it will be possible to do so. A lot of work is being done. It would be useful for interested members to read the report that was brought out this week, which mentions the different models of care that are being developed.

The role of the out-of-hours development group is to co-ordinate that work and to promote and encourage new models of care. There is a mixture

of redesign and use of traditional personnel, who are GPs. The developments are not out of line with the other redesigned services that are being developed throughout Scotland.

Nursery Education (Rural Areas)

5. Lord James Douglas-Hamilton (Lothians) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it will give practical and financial support to transport for nursery education in rural areas. (S2O-716)

The Deputy Minister for Education and Young People (Euan Robson): Section 37 of the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Act 2000 gives local authorities the power to provide transport free of charge to and from places that deliver pre-school education. The Scottish Executive makes available practical and financial support so that local authorities can implement that power as required.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Is the minister aware that in the rural village of Philipstoun in West Lothian there is no public transport to the nearest nursery school in the neighbouring village of Bridgend, which is some 3 miles away and is too far for the children to walk to? Should not the Executive now be considering giving assistance to communities in rural areas in that category so that they will not lose out? Will he please look into the matter as the local authority obviously has particular problems in that regard?

Euan Robson: I am not aware of the specific example that Lord James gave, but I will ask my officials to look into it with the local council. The Scottish Executive expects local authorities to ensure that pre-school education provision is as local as possible, minimising the need to transport children long distances. In addition, we support local authorities through grant-aided expenditure and the child care strategy. Indeed, £137 million is provided to local authorities in their GAE allocation, of which there is a rural weighting of £6.6 million. On the child care strategy, funding will increase from £19.25 million in this financial year to £40.65 million in 2005-06. Guidance is available on providing transport for young children; it is being developed as part of the growing up in rural Scotland programme, which is funded by the Scottish Executive.

Maureen Macmillan (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): Is the minister aware that local authorities vary in the priority that they give to funding transport for children going to nursery school? Will he ask local authorities what they are doing? Will he also ask them to ascertain whether there are children in their area who cannot access nursery school because of lack of transport? Such children living in isolated areas are the very children who need the social and educational development that nursery school would give.

Euan Robson: I will take the member's comments on board. It might be sensible to ask local authorities what they are achieving. Guidance, including transportation guidelines, is available, but I will get back to the member about that.

Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP): Is the minister aware that the newly published school transport guidelines say very little about nursery transport? The case of West Lothian is pertinent: whereas children in the villages of Torphichen and Westfield get free transport, because there is a primary school in their village but no nursery provision, the children of Philipstoun do not get free transport, because there is no primary school in the village. There are many such anomalies. Given that most three and four-year-olds can now access nursery education, we should examine why there is provision of transport in safety for five-year-olds but not for three and four-year-olds.

Euan Robson: As I have already said, local authorities can refer to the Scottish Executive's school transport guidelines, which the member mentioned, when making arrangements for pre-school children. The issues in West Lothian are primarily a matter for West Lothian Council, but I will look into the specific case that Lord James raised.

Antisocial Behaviour etc (Scotland) Bill (Human Rights Issues)

6. Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): To ask the Scottish Executive what human rights issues there are in relation to the Antisocial Behaviour etc (Scotland) Bill. (S2O-756)

The Minister for Communities (Ms Margaret Curran): The Executive is committed to tackling antisocial behaviour in Scotland effectively. The Antisocial Behaviour etc (Scotland) Bill is an important part of our wider strategy, which is aimed at delivering on that commitment to Scotland's communities.

The Executive is concerned with protecting the human rights of all Scotland's people, particularly those whose quality of life suffers because of the antisocial behaviour of a small minority of their fellow citizens.

The human rights issues in relation to particular provisions of the bill are set out in paragraphs 215 to 220 of the policy memorandum that accompanies the bill.

Patrick Harvie: In part 3 of the bill, section 16(1)(a) gives a power to the police to disperse groups of two or more people based on their "presence or behaviour". How can the dispersal of groups based on their presence alone be squared with article 11 of the European convention on human rights, which covers freedom of assembly?

Further, will the use of that power serve to build or undermine the relationship between the police and alienated groups within the communities that they serve?

Ms Curran: Part 3 of the bill gives the police new powers to disperse groups in areas designated as suffering from antisocial behaviour. Those powers comply with the ECHR and are a balanced and reasonable response to a pressing social need.

I take the opportunity to clarify our policy. It is not our intention—nor will it be the actuality—to target young people per se. We are trying to deal with antisocial behaviour and only those who perpetrate antisocial behaviour will be affected by our bill. I tell Patrick Harvie that young people themselves make up the group of people who have asked me by far and away the most often to take decisive action to tackle antisocial behaviour. They have said to me on countless occasions in my own constituency, “Why can I not use the community centre built by the local authority”—thanks to the funds from the Scottish Executive—“because there are gangs outside who will not let me use it? What are you going to do about gang violence? What are you going to do about antisocial behaviour?” Most requests that we get to take action are from young people themselves. This Executive looks forward to working with young people, and young people can have confidence that this Executive will deliver on their needs.

Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD): The minister gave a robust reply. Human rights and liberties often come into conflict. One person's liberty or right to live his or her life in his or her way—which may be a slightly unusual way in the eyes of other members of society—can conflict with the right of a lot of other people to have a reasonably peaceful life. How will the minister try to keep a balance between those conflicting rights, especially the rights of the individual and those of the community?

Ms Curran: Donald Gorrie raises a significant point. I assure him and all members who have expressed concern about the policy that we have not adopted it to be draconian towards young people. We understand the need to keep a balance between certain individual rights and community rights. Of course, we have to protect everybody's rights within communities, but we believe that the power is proportionate to the problems that we are trying to deal with. If Donald Gorrie looks at the detail of our policy, he will see that it is proportionate, as it tries to focus in on those who are causing difficulties within communities, to encourage young people—or other people—not to cause those difficulties, and to open them up to other opportunities.

The work that we have put into crime prevention, diversion from criminal activity and support for young people demonstrates that we recognise that we need to have a wealth of interventions and to take, as Donald Gorrie said, a balanced approach.

Mr Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab): Will the minister assure the chamber that she will uphold the human rights of young people, under article 5 of the ECHR, on the security of person, and the human rights of pensioners, under article 8, to respect for their homes, by cracking down on those selfish neds—I repeat selfish neds—in whom Patrick Harvie and other politically correct romantics seem to be more interested?

Ms Curran: No one should doubt the Executive's commitment to ensuring that the bill will be implemented. We are truly committed to ensuring that we deal with the problem of antisocial behaviour in our communities. I cannot be the only MSP in this chamber who goes to public meetings and hears the plea, “Please remember my human rights. Make sure my human rights are taken into account.” The work that I have done over many years to tackle both violence against women and racist violence is entirely consistent with the policies that I am trying to develop in this field. Everyone has the right to live free from violence, and we should never shirk from taking appropriate action to ensure that people do so. That is not just a claim; that is a reality for all Scotland's communities.

Schools (Safety)

7. Margaret Smith (Edinburgh West) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive what measures it is taking to ensure the safety of children in schools. (S2O-738)

The Minister for Education and Young People (Peter Peacock): The Executive encourages authorities and schools to take all reasonable steps to ensure school safety. We have issued guidance on aspects of safety and made specific funds available on occasion to support important measures.

Margaret Smith: The recent fatal stabbing of a Lincolnshire school pupil and today's news that there has been another incident in a classroom near Brighton have highlighted the fact that although it is rare, violence in schools is an issue that we must take seriously. Can the minister tell me how the Executive will ensure that the carrying of offensive weapons does not become more prevalent in Scotland's schools?

Peter Peacock: As Margaret Smith rightly said, there was a tragic incident in England during the past few weeks and another incident took place yesterday. Schools are part of the wider community and, in a Scottish context, the solutions

that we have to find for schools are part of the solutions that we have to find for the wider community. We have to make it clear that, in Scottish society, it is unacceptable to carry a knife habitually in the way that some young people have done in the past.

Carrying a knife is an offence and there are certain restrictions on the selling of knives and the advertising of certain types of weapon. The partnership agreement that we agreed following the recent election committed us to reviewing current knife legislation and its enforcement. Executive officials are in dialogue with the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland and the Crown Office to review whether current legislation is adequate and whether the enforcement of that legislation is adequate. The outcome of that dialogue will allow us to decide what further steps we have to take to pursue Margaret Smith's point.

Industrial Fisheries

8. Mr Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): To ask the Scottish Executive what action it is taking at European, or other, level to address issues such as cod and other white-fish bycatch associated with industrial fisheries. (S2O-753)

The Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Ross Finnie): The Scottish Executive remains concerned about the scale of industrial fishing and its potential impact on the marine ecosystem and has been active in discussing all future management options with the various committees within the European Commission.

Mr Ruskell: Increased control of industrial fisheries is crucial to the effort to hasten recovery of white-fish stocks. The minister will be aware that on Tuesday, the European Commission cited the United Kingdom for its failure to enforce Europe-wide rules that are designed to protect white-fish stocks, including failure to prevent illegal landings. As a result, Scottish boats might be confined to port if the UK does not give satisfactory guarantees to uphold the law within eight weeks. Does the minister acknowledge that illegal landings are happening in Scotland? Can he give an estimate of the percentage of white-fish catch that is landed illegally?

Ross Finnie: No, I am unable to give an answer to that and, of course, those are just allegations. If the Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency had evidence that is of the standard of proof that is properly required by a Scottish court, prosecutions would have been made. I shall read with interest the report of the allegations, which also takes one or two unfortunate side-swipes at the standard of proof that is required by Scots law. I do not think

that that is fair—we should all be proud of the system of law that we have in Scotland and of the standard of proof that is required to obtain a conviction. I am disappointed that the EC takes a different view.

Mr Andrew Welsh (Angus) (SNP): Does the minister accept that the bycatch adds further insult to injury, especially given the total failure to stop the Danes from increasing their industrial fishing quota? What has the minister done since to reduce that destructive fishing, which threatens the future of the fishing industry?

Ross Finnie: As a result of the bilateral talks with the Danes that took place as part of the discussions to which I referred in my first answer, we made representations about extending the closure of the sand-eel fishery on the Wee Bankie. We understand that that is going to happen; that is an advance.

On pressing the Commission and the scientists to look more closely at the impact on fisheries, it is instructive that this year's advice from the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea recommends a substantial reduction in the amount of industrial fishing. We can only hope that that will be raised during the December council, at which I and the rest of the UK representatives will be pressing for it.

House Sellers' Surveys (Energy Efficiency)

9. Eleanor Scott (Highlands and Islands) (Green): To ask the Scottish Executive whether its pilot study of house sellers' surveys will include an assessment of household energy efficiency and, if so, how this assessment will be carried out. (S2O-754)

The Presiding Officer: Mr Andy Kerr.

The Minister for Finance and Public Services (Mr Andy Kerr): It is Margaret Curran.

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): I am sorry. Margaret Curran.

The Minister for Communities (Ms Margaret Curran): I thought something had happened; however, I am sure the First Minister would have told me.

The detailed content of the survey reports that are to be used in the pilot is currently under development, but it is intended that the reports will include information on homes' energy efficiency. That is likely to include an energy rating that is calculated according to a recognised methodology, together with any general recommendations for improvements that might be expected to improve the energy efficiency of the property.

Eleanor Scott: That is what I wanted to hear. I

am sure that the minister agrees that unless the energy efficiency measure that is used is a measure such as the national home energy rating, the survey will give little information about the overall efficiency of houses and will offer little incentive for householders to invest. Will the minister assure Parliament that such a measure will be retained when the survey is rolled out nationally?

Ms Curran: The way we have approached the introduction of the single seller survey and the fact that we are having the pilot give us the opportunity to ensure that we get the survey right and that it is deliverable. The work of the housing improvement task force has informed that considerably. I recommend that the member look at that work, which took place during the previous session of Parliament. We are about to report on the matter.

I take absolutely the point that Eleanor Scott makes. We need to understand the impact of energy rating and we need to incentivise much better practice in the owner-occupied sector.

Tourism (European Funding)

10. Mr Kenny MacAskill (Lothians) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what action is being taken to ensure continued European funding for tourism. (S2O-719)

The Deputy First Minister and Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Mr Jim Wallace): Over £60 million has already been allocated to tourism in Scotland from the current European structural funds programmes, which run from 2000 to 2006. It is vital that we continue to work closely with partners to maximise uptake of the funding that is available to tourism over the remainder of the programme period. The Scottish Executive remains engaged in the evolving debate on the funds' future after 2006. We will continue to work with Scottish partners, the United Kingdom Government and European partners to ensure that Scottish interests are fully represented.

Mr MacAskill: The minister is aware that there is considerable worry among many tourism projects about what might happen after 2006. Projects such as the millennium wheel in Falkirk and Discovery Point in Dundee were provided by matched funding from Europe. What funding is likely to be available for Scotland and what funding might go to competitor accession states in Europe, contrary to our interests? What facilities will be available to access what is currently the matched funding?

Mr Wallace: As Mr MacAskill knows, there will undoubtedly be changes to the European structural funds programme after 2006. The admission of the accession countries, which are clearly much poorer than Scotland, will lead to a

shift of funding to those countries.

When the European Commission publishes its third cohesion report—probably within the next two months—we might get a better idea of the likely shape of future structural funds programmes. We will engage actively in the debate about that.

Let us not lose sight of the fact that, in the past year, tourism in Scotland has been funded to the tune of £90 million from public funds, which is a substantial investment. The allocation of £750,000 from public funds to bring the MTV Europe awards to Edinburgh was a great investment, which showed Edinburgh and Scotland in a very good light.

Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I ask the Scottish Executive yet again: when will it publish its review on area tourist boards, in order that tourist operators in Scotland may be clear about what is intended for their industry?

Mr Wallace: As Mr McGrigor knows, a ministerial working group on tourism is considering a range of issues in relation to the industry, including the different sources of public funding and important issues such as skills and training. We have made it clear that we want to take a wider view of tourism support before we take decisions on the area tourist board review. I cannot pre-empt the outcome of the ministerial group's work, but I hope that it will shortly be in a position to report to the Cabinet.

Primary Care Health Facilities

11. Susan Deacon (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what steps it is taking to ensure that high-quality, modern primary care health facilities are provided in local communities. (S2O-739)

The Minister for Health and Community Care (Malcolm Chisholm): That is a high priority on which we are making significant progress. Since 1999, £52 million has been invested from the central primary care premises modernisation fund. That has supported over 100 community-based health and community care premises projects. Patients are benefiting throughout the country, with excellent examples of modern facilities delivering joined-up services. There will also be a 70 per cent increase in recurring annual expenditure to fund new purpose-built leasehold premises between 2002-03 and 2005-06.

Susan Deacon: Does the minister agree that if the Executive's laudable commitment is to be translated into reality in communities, local national health service managers must deliver projects on the ground? Does he share my concern that the people of Musselburgh are still waiting for a start to be made on a new primary

care medical centre, which Lothian Primary Care NHS Trust originally promised would be completed by 2002? Will he ensure that his officials work closely with Lothian NHS Board to move the situation forward and, in so doing, will he further ensure that no unnecessary procedural barriers or delays stand in the way of what is a much needed and long overdue development?

Malcolm Chisholm: I am certainly pleased that £200,000 has been allocated to the project from the modernisation fund but, like Susan Deacon, I am concerned that it has been taking so long. There are two reasons for that. First, there has been a protracted period of negotiation on valuation issues. Secondly, Lothian NHS Board must get its business case in as quickly as possible—I understand that it is to be submitted in December. When it does come in, I undertake to have the Health Department deal with it very quickly.

Susan Deacon's final point was about involvement with the Health Department. The department has been working with Lothian NHS Board to help it to develop that business case. I hope that the whole issue will be progressed and concluded quickly.

Scottish Prison Service (Performance Indicators)

12. Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what the key performance indicators are for the Scottish Prison Service. (S20-726)

The Minister for Justice (Cathy Jamieson): Ministers have set targets for the SPS on seven key performance indicators, which cover the four strands of the mission statement: custody, order, care and opportunity. I will be happy to supply the member with a copy of the SPS annual report, which contains all the details.

Jackie Baillie: I think I thank the minister for that response. I have already read the annual report. The minister will be aware that the current performance indicators are based on quantitative rather than qualitative measures. Does the minister agree that, given the high levels of reoffending that exist, the SPS might be better to focus its performance indicators on attempting to reduce that reoffending?

Cathy Jamieson: It is important that we tackle the problems of reoffending. Three of the seven key performance indicators already focus in part on rehabilitation, in line with the challenges that we have set for the SPS to protect the public and reduce reoffending rates. I am aware of Jackie Baillie's interest in the subject, on which she has lodged a number of questions. I assure her that she will receive answers in due course. One of

those questions was about assessment and evaluation of some of the programmes that are used. That is very important—we must ensure that the programmes that we use in prisons are effective in achieving the outcomes that we seek.

Michael Matheson (Central Scotland) (SNP): Is the minister aware that the way in which the SPS calculates its key performance indicators on matters such as out-of-cell hours for prisoners—in particular, on prisoners going to prison workshops—does not reflect whether the prisoners are involved in any meaningful work? From experience, I know that many of the workshops in our prisons do not have work for prisoners to do; instead of working, the prisoners play cards. Will the minister instruct the SPS to ensure that the KPIs that it publishes are more transparent so that we can tell whether prisoners are engaged in meaningful work?

Cathy Jamieson: I suspect that that was what Jackie Baillie was getting at in her questions. I refer the member to the SPS annual report, which gives fuller information on meeting the performance targets. As I have already said, it is important that whatever goes on in our prisons and during community sentences, which we heard about in yesterday's debate, tackles the problem of reoffending rates and ensures that people's behaviour is turned round.

Rhona Brankin (Midlothian) (Lab): I declare an interest as chair of the Scottish Library and Information Council. Does the minister agree that the provision of high-quality learning opportunities and access to information in prisons in Scotland is central to prevention of reoffending and that prison libraries and information support services are key to delivering lifelong learning in our prisons? Will the minister agree to meet key stakeholders to explore the development of standards in that area?

Cathy Jamieson: I am happy to confirm my view—which is also the Executive's view—that that area is important. I was recently delighted to have the opportunity to open the new learning centre at Glenochil prison, which provides exactly the kind of facilities that Rhona Brankin refers to. I am not aware of any particular difficulties in that area but, if the member wishes to give me more information, I will certainly give a commitment to take the matter up with the relevant people and, if necessary, to have a meeting.

Land Register

13. Scott Barrie (Dunfermline West) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what progress has been made with regard to placing the land register of Scotland online. (S20-734)

The Deputy Minister for Justice (Hugh

Henry): There are two aspects to putting the land register online. The first is to make it possible to search the register and to extract information from it online. That has already been achieved through the registers direct service.

The other side is online registration. At present, registration is made by paper deeds because the law requires physical signatures. Registers of Scotland has, under its automated registration of title to land initiative, carried out a detailed study, pilot exercise and consultation on introducing electronic registration for routine transactions. The agency is considering the legislative changes that are needed to permit paperless registration.

Scott Barrie: As the minister knows, over the past couple of months I have been contacted by several constituents who have pointed out difficulties regarding their details on the land register. To benefit them and others, I want to ask what the likely time scale is for completing the roll-out of the online process.

Hugh Henry: For the land register, that process has been introduced gradually across Scotland, county by county. On automated registration of title to land, the time scale for that project is not yet certain. As Scott Barrie knows from conversations that we have had, the process is complex. Paper title deeds have a long history and an entrenched position in the conveyancing process. Significant legal, cultural and business changes are required in order to move to the electronic medium. However, once that is established, it should lead to a reduction in registration costs for customers.

Dental Services (Inverness)

14. John Farquhar Munro (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive what action it is taking to increase national health service dental provision in Inverness. (S2O-748)

The Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care (Mr Tom McCabe): Responsibility for the overall provision of NHS dental services in Inverness rests with Highland Primary Care NHS Trust. However, the Executive is aware that there are problems with access to NHS dental services in some parts of Scotland, including Inverness. For that reason, Highland is one of the designated areas of Scotland that benefit from enhanced incentives in the recruitment and retention package that was introduced by the Executive.

John Farquhar Munro: In view of that welcome and encouraging response, I ask the minister what steps have been taken to extend NHS dentistry provision to other areas of Scotland.

Mr McCabe: As I have said to Parliament, we

are urgently examining provision of NHS dentistry. I can confirm that we will make a statement on the subject in the chamber next week.

Mr Alasdair Morrison (Western Isles) (Lab): We all fully appreciate that the Scottish Executive has introduced new incentives to NHS practices, as the minister has outlined. Unfortunately, those have not eased the recruitment problems for the only dental practice in Lewis and Harris. The dentist there—Ken Macdonald—has given over 20 years of excellent service to thousands of my constituents, but he continues to experience difficulty in recruiting dentists. Mr Macdonald has no desire to take his practice, which is staffed entirely by NHS dentists, into the private sector. Does the minister agree that that is exactly the type of situation that requires immediate and urgent attention?

Mr McCabe: I agree fully with that. The incentive package that was introduced has in many respects helped to stem the tide, but it has not been totally successful. That is why we fully recognise that there is a need to review again the provision of dental health services in Scotland. I entirely concur with the sentiments of Mr Macdonald—[*Laughter.*—]—I mean Mr Morrison.

Glasgow Crossrail

15. Bill Butler (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what its position is on Strathclyde Passenger Transport's crossrail technical feasibility study, which was submitted to the Minister for Transport on 28 October 2003. (S2O-720)

The Minister for Transport (Nicol Stephen): I can tell Mr Butler that officials have been studying the SPT proposal for the Glasgow crossrail project. I hope soon to be in a position to make an announcement on our response.

Bill Butler: I thank the minister for that encouraging reply. Given the national benefit that will accrue from the crossrail project, is the response that we can expect soon liable to be positive?

Nicol Stephen: I hope to clarify that in my response. As Mr Butler knows, the partnership agreement commits the Executive to supporting the feasibility studies on the Glasgow crossrail project. I do not believe that any significant problems have been identified in the work that officials have done to date. Without making the announcement today, I would be as confident as I could be that, in due course, the response might be positive.

The Presiding Officer: It is three seconds before 3.10 pm. Question 16 has been withdrawn, so the last question is question 17.

Forest Enterprise (Land Transfer)

17. Mark Ballard (Lothians) (Green): To ask the Scottish Executive what its position is on free transfer of land currently managed by Forest Enterprise to community groups where there is a demonstrable capability to manage the land for community and environmental benefit. (S2O-752)

The Deputy Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Allan Wilson): The Forestry Commission Scotland manages its assets and financial affairs within the terms of the "Scottish Public Finance Manual", which imposes a duty to obtain the best possible price for the taxpayer from the disposal of surplus public assets.

Mark Ballard: Does the minister agree nonetheless that in areas with a long-standing interest in community ownership, such as Borgie in north Sutherland, placing deforested land on the disposal list would be valid in order to allow transfer to the community to take place?

Allan Wilson: I know that the Greens do not believe in economic growth to pay for improved public services but, to use Duncan McNeil's word, it would be new romanticism to start giving away the forestry estate to anybody who asks for it. I suspect that the Greens do not employ such a policy in relation to their own resources.

Community groups and other qualifying bodies can be and are given a preferential opportunity to acquire surplus land under our sponsorship scheme. That land is not offered at a discount, but the process is undertaken in conjunction with the district valuer and in concert with our wider land reform agenda of opening up greater parts of Scotland to community ownership and other forms of public ownership.

Public Libraries

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): The next item of business is a debate on motion S2M-594, in the name of Frank McAveety, on celebrating 150 years of public libraries in Scotland, and three amendments to the motion.

15:12

The Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport (Mr Frank McAveety): I thank members who have stayed to participate in the debate. The topic may initially seem less than inspiring but, given the critical role that libraries have played in the past 150 years in communities in all parts of Scotland, I expect that we will hear members speak about the transformative capacity of investment in public libraries on people's life experience and their opportunities. I welcome the opportunity to outline the Executive's perspective on public libraries.

In his seminal work "Cosmos", Carl Sagan said:

"The library connects us with the insight and knowledge, painfully extracted from Nature, of the greatest minds that ever were, with the best teachers, drawn from the entire planet and from all our history, to instruct us without tiring, and to inspire us to make our own contribution to the collective knowledge of the human species. I think the health of our civilization, the depth of our awareness about the underpinnings of our culture and our concern for the future can all be tested by how well we support our libraries."

That quotation was fairly long, but it is a noble contribution about the importance of libraries to everyday life.

Scotland's history of education and erudition means that libraries were used well before public libraries were developed in the 19th century. University libraries were a substantial feature of Scottish life, knowledge and learning before and after the reformation. Libraries and the dissemination of knowledge through library books have been central to the development of access to information and knowledge throughout our country.

Here in Edinburgh, the University of Edinburgh library predates the university—the library was founded in 1580 and taken over 34 years later by the university. In Aberdeen, as far back as 1632, Marischal College employed Scotland's first university librarian.

The Deputy First Minister, who is sitting beside me, will claim that Kirkwall has the oldest public library in Scotland—the Bibliothek of Kirkwall, which dates from 1683. The books from that collection, which were bequeathed by William Baikie, are kept today by the university library in Aberdeen. Later in the debate, other members will speak about the role of the public libraries that

were funded through public subscription, which is one of the commitments that emerged from the 19th century legislation.

The 18th century marked the origin of publicly available library provision in Scotland on a larger scale than was previously the case. That was partly as a result of the circulating libraries, which were usually run in conjunction with bookshops and found mainly in the large towns and cities, but much more as a result of institutional provision, which was highly appropriate at that time to Scotland's developing needs.

The subscription library and its accompanying ideology were part of the development of the Scottish enlightenment values that are Scotland's distinctive contribution to literary history and to the history of libraries. The subscription libraries were run like clubs or societies. Members paid an entry fee to join and an annual subscription, which was used to buy books and pay administrative costs. Less than 200yd from the chamber, the first circulating library in Britain was founded by Allan Ramsay in 1725. The first public working-class subscription library in Britain was founded at Leadhills in 1741—although it was not originally a working-class library, it subsequently became one.

By the middle of the 19th century, Scotland was becoming increasingly urbanised. Life in its rapidly growing towns posed many problems of health, welfare and education. One of the key features of Scottish society at that time has been identified in some of the seminal work of one of our foremost historians, Tom Devine. Committees set up libraries in towns to encourage self-improvement through education. Allied to that, the drive by institutes, churches and charities to establish collections of books, often in rural areas, aimed to ensure that individuals had access to knowledge irrespective of class and income.

William Ewart, the member of Parliament for Dumfries, proposed the establishment of public libraries

"for the Instruction and Recreation of the People".

It is curious to note that his bill—not unlike the reform bill of a few years earlier—was fiercely attacked. The fear was that ordinary people would have access to knowledge and information that they could utilise in the emerging political consciousness of the mid-19th century.

At that time, MPs feared increased taxation. One even suggested that the Parliament would next be asked to provide the

"working classes with quoits, peg-tops and foot-ball".

Can members imagine a Scottish Parliament ever being obsessed with football or a Scottish sports minister, especially in this week of noble intentions, supporting football?

Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie)

(Lab): I do not want to interrupt the minister's history lesson, but would he let us know what books he discussed with Rod Stewart, Sheena Easton and Pamela Anderson when he met them recently in his role as our man in the kilt?

Mr McAveety: I am sorry to disappoint Des McNulty, but there were even more interesting things to discuss with those individuals. Unlike him, I took the opportunity to exchange telephone numbers.

The fundamental issue that needs to be addressed, and which lies behind Des McNulty's intervention, is what we do to ensure that people have access to knowledge and information, irrespective of their background. Like Des McNulty, I have, in my previous roles in local government, been supportive of attempts to ensure greater access to the public library service and a greater quality and range of experience for individuals there.

The Public Libraries and Museums Act 1850 was extended to Scotland in 1853—150 years ago. Towns of a certain minimum size could levy a rate of a halfpenny in the pound to fund public libraries. I know of a town in the west of Scotland that adopted the provisions of the act with great vigour. We will hear from the local member from that area in due course.

In 1866, Dundee was one of the next towns in Scotland to adopt the provisions of the act, but by 1868 only eight towns had established libraries. By the turn of the century, public libraries were being developed and improved on a dramatic scale. That was partly through the philanthropy of Andrew Carnegie, but also because of the increasing commitment of individuals who were elected to local authorities to represent disadvantaged communities and who encouraged people to utilise libraries as one of the key tools for social improvement.

As we are aware, Carnegie made a substantial contribution to the library network across the globe. Through his contribution, more than 2,500 libraries have been established throughout the world. In 1909, he opened his most northerly and remote library, in Kirkwall in the Orkney islands.

Stewart Stevenson (Banff and Buchan)

(SNP): Does the minister share my disappointment that some important aspects of Scottish literature are not adequately represented in Scottish libraries? I refer in particular to the oldest book containing any written form of Scots Gaelic, the "Book of Deer", which comes from Deer abbey in my constituency but has for many years been locked in Corpus Christi College library in Cambridge. Will he join me in campaigning to bring the book back to Scotland and to put it on

public exhibition at some appropriate place and time in the near future?

Mr McAveety: I am happy to support any key legacy of Scottish history and culture that can be showcased more appropriately in institutions in Scotland. If the member wishes to write to me, I will raise that matter with the National Library of Scotland to see whether we can gain at least some opportunity for Scottish citizens to experience that important piece of our history.

As well as the important and precious books and collections that are sometimes not easily accessible to the public because of the risk of damage, the critical issue is the way in which libraries have improved the quality and range of the services that they provide.

I have tried to sketch the historical background that made the popular demand for public libraries so great. A general reading of Scottish fiction will show that many of the characters in those books were inspired by access to public libraries. One can barely read a book about the development of the urban working class in Glasgow without some reference to a key character utilising the public library service in the city.

Although we have tried to improve library standards by providing guidelines, some of which have taken some time to be established, there is still a long way to go to ensure that libraries are a central and critical part of people's life experience throughout Scotland.

At present in Scotland, we have more than 550 permanently sited libraries and 93 mobile libraries. Many of those libraries have increasingly had to compete in recent years with the many other diversions of young people. Some 30 or 40 years ago, there were fewer diversions and choices for young people, but today there are many more. We need to find ways of ensuring that libraries are much more effective.

The public are more discerning in what they expect and demand. Even our bookshops are different from what they were in previous years. They are more dynamic to meet customer expectation. However, the range of services available in local bookshops could be usefully compared with the range available in those public libraries that have been stuck in a 1950s and 1960s mindset.

Mr Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab): Thanks to the capital investment from the people's network, libraries throughout the country now provide many valuable new services. Does the minister agree that it is vital that local authorities meet their responsibilities to provide the necessary revenue funding to ensure that such services can continue?

Mr McAveety: I agree with Duncan McNeil about the role that the people's network plays. Many library services are at the lower end of local authority resource allocation and they have to compete with other pressing needs in the budget. We need to create a landscape in which authorities feel more comfortable about using investment in public libraries to address many of the other social challenges in their areas.

The people's network is one of the key tools in that process. Certainly, the evidence indicates that people are using it much more effectively, not just for access to information and learning, but to find work and for personal business development, community enrichment, social inclusion and development of their sense of well-being and creativity. The knock-on effect is a welcome development in rates of participation in public libraries, which had diminished in recent years. We need to use the network more effectively and local authorities certainly have a key role to play. That is why I am happy to accept—if possible—the amendments that have been lodged by Chris Ballance and Mr Jamie McGrigor. I do not know whether the Presiding Officer can enlighten members about whether I can.

I move,

That the Parliament notes that this year marks the 150th anniversary of the Public Libraries Act in Scotland; congratulates public libraries on the diverse service they provide and, in particular, commends them for the success of the People's Network in encouraging even greater use of library facilities, and praises local authorities for the part they play in providing this service.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh):

It is entirely a matter for the minister which amendments he agrees to accept. Members will make their decisions at decision time.

15:25

Roseanna Cunningham (Perth) (SNP): The debate is on a subject that is close to my heart. I thought that I would do a Stewart Stevenson today and say, "Not a lot of people know this." In Australia, before I went to university, I spent four years in library work and gained professional library qualifications. Sadly, however, I worked in a university library and not in the public library system. Stewart Stevenson's crown therefore remains.

Like the Deputy First Minister, I have a strong local interest in the debate and in the development of public libraries in Scotland. Innerpeffray library, which is the oldest lending library in Scotland, is in my constituency. I suspect that other members, too, will mention libraries in their constituencies this afternoon. Innerpeffray library dates from around 1680 and therefore predates the Public Libraries (Ireland and Scotland) Act 1853 by a

considerable period.

Indeed, in what may have been the Lonely Planet guide of its day—"Travels in Northern England and Scotland"—Thomas Newte wrote in 1791:

"It is impossible to pass over the venerable beauties of Innerpeffray, fronting Castle Drummond, in the concavity of serpentizing Ern, its castle, the antient seat of the Lords of Maderty, its chapel, public library and school, both established for the good of community and carrying back the mind to the antient situation and genius of Scotland."

That "good of community" was a driving force behind the growth of public libraries in Scotland over many years and, indeed, centuries. As well as libraries established by churches and charities, groups of workers would get together to buy books to set up libraries. Miners at Leadhills and Wanlockhead and the mechanics institute in Airdrie are prime examples. I am sure that other members will want to say something about those.

The 1853 act was certainly a major landmark in the history of public libraries, although the cap on the rate that could be levied to provide libraries was not lifted until 1919. A truly comprehensive and free library service was possible only once the local authorities had been given that fiscal freedom. I hope that the Parliament will have secured a similar advantage long before we celebrate the 150th anniversary of that landmark.

While the penny rate held back the involvement of local authorities in the early stages of the development of public libraries, the support of philanthropists such as Andrew Carnegie was extremely important. No look through the history of Scottish libraries would be complete without an acknowledgement of the contribution of Andrew Carnegie. Whatever one might think about the way in which he amassed his millions, he was certainly generous in his philanthropy. Towns and cities throughout Scotland can attest to his generosity, which we should acknowledge.

Such libraries reflected and encouraged the desire for education and self-improvement among Scotland's working class. Access to the public libraries, hand in hand with the development of public education, were the means by which all Scottish society could start to participate in Scottish intellectual life.

Libraries remain a key public service. Almost 60 per cent of the population regularly use libraries' services. There are 557 libraries in Scotland, which lend more than 37 million items each year in 31 million visits. Furthermore, they enable 8.5 million hours of internet access to be provided to communities throughout Scotland.

In my constituency, as well as the library at Innerpeffray, there are libraries in Perth, Comrie, Crieff and Auchterarder, and a mobile service that

travels throughout Perthshire every week. Members who represent rural parts of Scotland will be familiar with the mobile libraries that give such a good service to our outlying communities.

It is important to take the opportunity that the anniversary provides to look back, to thank and to congratulate all those who have been involved in the development of the library service as well as those who currently work in the continually developing service. However, the anniversary is also an opportunity to take stock of where we are, to look to the future and to determine what changes need to be made to how things are done.

Everything in the garden is not rosy for Scotland's libraries. The percentage of the population who borrow books from libraries is declining and the number of books borrowed by each user, although not at an all-time low, has failed to increase in the past four to five years. There is no doubt that some of that is because of a general shift in public interest away from books towards the internet and television, both for information and for entertainment, and an increased ability and desire among our consumer society to own rather than to borrow or rent everything that we use.

However, there is another reason. Book funds for our libraries have dropped on average by 30 per cent throughout Scotland in the past five years, while book prices have risen by 36.2 per cent over the same period. Members can begin to see what some of the pressures are when it comes to stocking our public libraries.

Many library buildings are in desperate need of investment for repairs and upgrades; they are not necessarily welcoming and comfortable places to be. As public buildings have to comply with the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 by October next year, what assurances can the Executive give that funding will be available to help libraries to meet 21st century access problems without having to sacrifice funding for the provision of books and services to the public? Perhaps the minister can comment on that.

There is no support for indigenous Scottish library suppliers. The last one closed last year, which raised concerns about access to Scottish publishers and titles. All that Elaine Murray, the minister responsible at the time, would say in a parliamentary answer was that each local authority is responsible for its own library service and for determining allocation of funding for purchasing books. Aside from a Scottish Arts Council-Scottish Enterprise programme to support new developments in the distribution of printed works, does the minister have plans to support publishing in Scotland through the library system? Information that has come into our e-mail inboxes today indicates that, although there are more than

500 public libraries in Scotland, fewer than five copies of most Scottish books are purchased by them—that is one book per 100 libraries. That suggests that Scottish publishing is not being supported from within the library service. We must consider that important issue.

The motion rightly congratulates public libraries on the diverse service that they provide, but there is a huge danger in complacency. Funding for the people's network is ring fenced and provided by the new opportunities fund. The network's future will be in jeopardy if local government and the Executive are unwilling to build on its achievements, as new opportunities funding for the project will cease in April 2004. Can the minister comment on that?

Local authorities have, down the years, certainly played a praiseworthy part in providing Scotland's library service but, given the immense pressures on their budgets and the increasing demands from what are seen as more essential services, libraries are in danger of being squeezed out. Local authorities' spending on libraries, as a percentage of the total amount spent on public services, is declining.

The debate is an opportunity to celebrate libraries, but it is also an opportunity to do something. I had hoped that there would be a major announcement today, but sadly that does not seem to be the case. I do not take offence at the SNP amendment not being accepted when the other ones are being accepted. I did not want the debate to consist simply of platitudes, because there are important issues to talk about. I urge members to support the SNP amendment. It is proffered in a constructive manner rather than a negative one.

I move amendment S2M-594.2, to leave out from "and, in particular", to end and insert:

"; calls on the Scottish Executive to secure funding for the People's Network beyond the cessation of New Opportunities Fund support in April 2004; recognises the important part that local authorities have played, and continue to play, in providing library services, and urges the Executive to enable local authorities to reverse the recent trend of a decline in the proportion of funds spent on libraries."

15:33

Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I welcome Frank McAveety back to the reality of the chamber after his starring role in the MTV awards. I congratulate him on his thespian versatility. Today, he is starring in the role of Conan the librarian.

It is relevant that the stage on which the minister is playing the part is Edinburgh, a city that has done so much to promote libraries and that, during

the explosion of learning that was the Scottish enlightenment, set the foundations for public libraries through the establishment of circulating libraries. The University of Edinburgh library, founded in 1580, predates the university. The advocates library, founded in 1680, published Scotland's first printed library catalogue in 1692. The first British circulating library was, as we heard from the minister, founded by Allan Ramsay in 1725. This is the city where Thomas Nelson, the publisher, started the Nelson reading rooms. My friend Brian Monteith will continue with the historical legacy later; I shall now move to modern times.

In August 2002, John Crawford—in a paper that he delivered to the International Federation of Library Associations conference in Glasgow—said of Scotland's past association with libraries:

"It is now accepted that Scotland, in common with other northern European countries, had a national educational ideology which aimed, at low cost, to instil basic literacy and numeracy into the entire population and encourage a participation in the search for knowledge at all social levels. The ideology of mutual improvement complemented this by providing the literate with an inexpensive opportunity for book use."

He was, of course, speaking about the benefits of the library system.

Those who were behind the national education ideology that existed then would surely be very worried if they saw the figures for attainment in publicly funded schools that were released in December 2002. Those figures show that the percentage of secondary 2 pupils who attained level E or above was only 53.6 per cent in mathematics, 58.9 per cent in English reading and 49.8 per cent in English writing. Level E should be attainable by some pupils in primary 7, by pupils in S1 and certainly by most pupils in S2. The truth is that more than two fifths of S2 pupils are failing to read, write or count to an acceptable level. As those who are involved in trade and industry keep pointing out to us, that will pose huge problems for Scottish businesses when they want to take on young employees in the future.

Today, we must hope that the role of libraries can help to address that dire situation. Young people must be encouraged to read and to make use of the lending libraries and all that goes with them. Five or six years ago, Chris Smith, the Labour secretary of state, commissioned a survey on libraries. During the consultation, focus groups identified the main concerns and needs. Two points emerged above all others: the first was that more new books were needed; the second was that libraries should be open more often. The proposal was to spend £800 million on improving United Kingdom libraries. However, the reality is that there are now fewer books and many libraries are closed for one or two days a week.

Neil MacGregor, who was the director of the National Gallery and is now the director of the British Museum, tells us that more people in the UK go to public libraries every week than go to football matches. I was amazed by that fact, but it is true. Our cultural institutions, such as libraries, are still a vital basis for the diffusion of knowledge as, for that matter, are many of the knowledgeable and committed staff who have accumulated expert knowledge over years of experience—that knowledge and experience can never be truly replaced by computers.

On the issue of computers, local authorities are voicing concerns about the sustainability of the people's network now that the funding from the new opportunities fund is to run out. Councils in my region pay large sums for line rental. Argyll and Bute Council, for example, is paying £77,000 per annum. Because of the lack of choice in the region, Argyll and Bute Council and some other councils in the Highlands, such as Western Isles Council, are forced to use BT because there is no competition from cable companies to bring the price down.

The question must be asked whether money should be ring fenced for computers in libraries. Surely the money should be used to respond to the needs and wants of those who go to the libraries—which have been identified as more books, please, and extended opening hours for libraries. There is nothing wrong with the internet cafes, but libraries exist primarily for the circulation of books and that should remain the case.

The travelling libraries are very useful to people in rural areas. Councils in rural areas recognise that fact and are trying to keep the number of travelling libraries at the maximum. The libraries provide an invaluable service to all people, but especially to the older and infirm readers in our communities and to those who cannot afford to spend money on books but still wish to read them.

New Scottish literature is often missing in Scottish libraries, yet the Scottish literary tradition is rich and vibrant—its voice sings through history from the incomparable verse of Robert Burns to the exciting books of today's authors such as Kenneth Steven, Alexander McCall Smith and Giles Foden, to name but three. Unfortunately, not enough of that new writing is available in our libraries. On average, only five copies of each new book published are bought for the 500 libraries.

It was a great Conservative, Bonar Law, who made the library service truly comprehensive. We believe that libraries are an essential aid to people in lifelong learning and we will continue to support them.

I move amendment S2M-594.1, to insert at end:

“and notes the importance that libraries play in improving

literacy rates for people of all ages.”

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Before I call the next speaker, Chris Ballance, I have to advise the chamber that I have had a request from Mr Ballance to lodge a manuscript amendment to replace the amendment in his name. There are, essentially, two changes. It is proposed to insert the wording of the amendment between the penultimate and the final clauses in Mr McAveety's motion and to add a reference to local authorities.

In general, we encourage members to finalise the wording of amendments before they lodge them. That includes finalising any interparty negotiations that might be necessary to secure agreement on the acceptability of amendments. In this case, I have decided to accept the amendment, as the changed amendment is, essentially, the same as the original amendment, but I would not encourage members to believe that the Presiding Officers will always be that indulgent.

The minor nature of the change means that it is unnecessary for the entire business bulletin to be reprinted; the time scale involved has made that impossible to do in any case. However, photocopies of the amended amendment are available at the reference desk in the normal manner.

With that lengthy explanation, I call Chris Ballance to speak to the amended, amended amendment in his name.

15:41

Chris Ballance (South of Scotland) (Green): Thank you for your forbearance, Presiding Officer. I trust that the amended amendment will be acceptable to the Executive. It is my understanding that it will be.

The public libraries of Britain provide a service that is second to none and has led to the entertainment and education of generations and classes of people. As a campaigner, I have made extensive use of local libraries, the Mitchell library in Glasgow and the National Library of Scotland. I spent a short period working in the central library in Edinburgh when it first computerised its catalogue. It is noticeable that the first involvement that most members of the public in Britain had with computers was when they borrowed a book from their library.

When I lived in East Lothian, some 22 years ago, I wrote my first play with reference to books that had been printed abroad or were out of print, which were delivered to my door from the British Library stacks in Wetherby by a mobile library van for the cost of a few pence. How could that service be better?

Times move on. The growth of the internet and book sales is changing libraries fast. Visitor numbers to libraries in Scotland have dropped from 33.1 million in 1995-96 to 28.1 million last year—a 13 per cent drop in six years. Across the UK, book loans have dropped by 23 per cent in the past three years. The internet revolution has put libraries in Scotland in crisis, but they have a crucial role in their local communities and it is vital that we consider ways of reinvigorating and reinventing them.

We also note the submission by the Scottish Publishers Association suggesting that accessions departments should actively go out and search for new Scottish books to ensure that the vagaries of library supplies do not act against Scottish work.

The minister will no doubt be aware of the Demos think-tank report “Overdue: How to create a modern library service”. That report argues:

“Libraries will attract additional resources only by putting their own house in order”.

However, changing direction—holding reviews, managing change, retraining, going out into the community and so on—will cost money and we must take that into account. Further, we Greens do not agree with the Demos suggestion of creating a national library development agency to take responsibility for change away from local librarians.

The main point of my amendment is that we should be celebrating 150 years of not only public libraries but public librarians. We should support them in their responses to the local situations and in their attempts to reposition themselves at the heart of their communities. Sandyford library in Glasgow, for example, offers not only books, but a sexual health drop-in service and a crèche. Children’s services, which are crucial in education, increasing access to information technology and the continuing role of librarians as the main custodians of and experts on local history are all vital in encouraging people back into libraries.

Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): I like the cut of Chris Ballance’s jib. Does he think that local authorities could rationalise the housing of public information a bit more? After all, we in the Parliament use local libraries, as the *Official Report* and other documents are distributed through the partner libraries.

Chris Ballance: Local authorities should be encouraged to work with libraries to do what they can to encourage more people back through the library doors, which might require some radical thinking. We applaud the initiatives in Aberdeen and South Lanarkshire, which is in my region, to link school and public libraries.

Those are all exciting new directions for public libraries, and they all have some cost implications. Some of those costs can be met by accessing money from other budgets, such as health. That is an area in which local authorities can encourage cross-cutting initiatives, but all budgets are tight.

Public libraries support those who are forgotten by society—the elderly, the housebound, asylum seekers, the disabled, the young and those on low incomes—and the information that they provide makes them beacons of lifelong learning, social justice and egalitarianism. We must continue to support them. I ask the minister to set a target for his department to act to stop the current free-fall in library visits and to determine a strategy that will address it in this parliamentary session. That is a tough assignment, but it would make the debate worth while, because if the decline continues, the debate is only hot air.

I thank all those librarians who have helped me over the years with advice, information and research on a wide range of topics, from the address of a local community group to the colour of a rose mentioned in an Oscar Wilde play for a theatrical prop. My experience of Scotland’s librarians has been of a breed of people who love difficult, abstruse questions and love going out of their way to be helpful.

I move amendment S2M-594.4, to insert after “facilities”:

“congratulates Scotland’s librarians but notes with concern falling visitor numbers and calls on the Scottish Executive and local authorities to do all they can to reverse this situation; notes that libraries have great potential as community hubs and that their outreach and social inclusion functions are vital and often overlooked and applauds those libraries that are imaginatively tackling these important issues, and further congratulates those libraries that have put their catalogues online and engaged fully with new technology, enabling more of the population to access them.”.

15:47

Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD): The point of studying the past is to understand the present and plan better for the future. Scotland has a glorious record with regard to libraries, the purpose of which was well summed up in 1863 by George Baillie, a great Glaswegian, who said that it was

“to aid the self-culture of the operative classes, from youth to manhood and old age, by furnishing them with warm, well-lighted and every way comfortable accommodation at all seasons for reading useful and interesting books.”

He used the term “self-culture” where we might talk about self-improvement, but it is a key part of the concept of the library not that somebody does something for us but that we have to go and do something for ourselves. There is a well from which we must drink, but we have to go there and

do the drinking.

Other members have made interesting historical allusions. Innerpefferay library has a record of lending since 1747 from which it is clear that the books are an amazingly wide range of what was then modern philosophy, as well as religion and the other things about which people read more in those days, and that a wide range of people read the books. That was the big difference in Scotland: the popular education system meant that literacy was wide. I found in my studies of recruitment of Scots into the army that the sergeant was often a Scot because he was the only guy who could read and write and therefore keep the nominal roll.

Wanlockhead has also been mentioned. Unfortunately, the Museum of Lead Mining, of which the library there is a part, is in danger of closing. I hope that we can sort out the funding of the Wanlockhead library and keep it as a great early example of a local working man's library.

Allan Ramsay's lending library has also been mentioned. Things do not change very much. The town council of the day got very excited that Allan Ramsay was spreading vice and irreligion, so it sent inspectors down to the library. The inspectors were astonished to find that most of the books were books of sermons and religious texts, so they gave up and said that he could keep his library. However, he then tried to start a theatre, but of course that was going too far and they closed that down.

Harry Home—I am not sure whether it is pronounced "Home" or "Hume", but somebody may be able to correct me—also deserves a mention. He, more than any other individual, created the National Library of Scotland by making the advocates library an all-purpose library as opposed to just a legal one.

As other members have said, there is at present a serious reduction in book stocks and in investment in book stocks. Like many others in the chamber, I have been guilty in the past, as a councillor faced with severe expenditure cuts imposed by successive Governments, of thinking that we could reduce the books purchase fund by just 1 or 2 per cent. However, if that is done year after year, it causes serious problems. Some years ago—much longer ago than five years—when I was an MP, I was researching the amount of books bought by libraries and there was already a clear picture of book purchases and book stocks coming down a lot.

Allusion has been made to Scottish publishers and to what sort of books libraries buy. Buying Scottish books is an important issue, but there is also the question of self-improvement versus popular novels, and the libraries have a difficult balancing act to perform. It is important that the

value of books is not measured merely by the number of lendings. It may be idealistic, politically correct or, as I think Duncan McNeil said, romantic, but I think that one or two lendings of a book that really improves somebody and teaches him or her things is more important than 10 lendings of a popular novel.

It is important that we commit more and more money annually to libraries to help with both books and information technology, and a balance between the two must be kept. However, there seems to be some research to show that books still do just as well as a method of educating people as IT does, and the lifelong learning that we are all committed to should centre round the libraries. Libraries should be the powerhouses of lifelong learning and long may they flourish.

15:53

Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab): I am particularly pleased to be able to take part in today's debate, not least because I spent my student summers touring rural Lanarkshire working as a library assistant on a mobile library.

As many members will know, Airdrie has played an historic part in the development of public libraries in Scotland. As early as 1792, a subscription library was set up in the town and, in 1837, the mechanics institute took over the collection. Following the extension of the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1850 to cover Scotland in 1853, Airdrie became the first town in Scotland to make use of the newly available powers. On 1 November 1853, electors voted by 211 to 20 to adopt the act. It would be 13 years before another local authority, the city of Dundee, adopted the act. That fact was recognised by Andrew Carnegie, who funded a series of libraries in the town of Airdrie, when he stated:

"Airdrie was the first town in Scotland to adopt the Free Libraries Act of 1853—an honour of which Airdrie can never be robbed."

[*Laughter.*] There are many others.

In July 1854, a library rate was levied and Airdrie Town Council bought the mechanics institute library for the sum of only £40—a price worth paying. By 1860, Airdrie had employed its first paid librarian and, in 1894, Airdrie's first purpose-built library was opened. The present library building, which was completed in 1925 through funding from the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust, houses one of only two municipal observatories in Scotland. Local people of all ages continue to use that resource, most recently to view Mars during its recent close pass to the earth.

Public libraries are as relevant now as they were two centuries ago. They continue to offer access to information, recreation and educational

development and now offer a broad range of items for lending, including videos, DVDs, talking books, computer games and magazines. In addition, they offer a range of services to local people such as photocopying and fax services. Contrary to the views of some people, I do not believe that public libraries are threatened by the dawn of the information age. At their best, libraries complement the information revolution by providing free access to the internet for those who cannot afford home access, as well as much-needed support and education for those who are learning to use the internet.

In Lanarkshire, libraries play a vital part in the lifelong learning process through the use of open learning centres. Libraries have always been associated with personal and community development and I am pleased that that continues to be the case. To prove that the book is not quite dead, the reader development project, which is being run in libraries throughout Scotland, encourages people aged between 18 and 30 to use the public internet terminals and to enjoy the wider benefits of library membership.

I welcome the opportunity to celebrate 150 years of public libraries and my town's role in that important initiative. In that time, public libraries have been vital in enabling thousands of working-class men and women to access further and higher education. There is no doubt that public libraries' role is changing and that information is now far more easily accessible through the internet, but libraries have a valuable role in ensuring that the benefits of the information revolution are available to all.

I was pleased to be at Airdrie library on 1 November, when readers and former staff were invited along to celebrate the library's history. Such people continue to ensure that libraries have a place in Scottish life and continue to be an obvious place for the provision of lifelong learning opportunities within communities. In the next 150 years, libraries will inevitably change, but I am sure that they will continue to be relevant and to play an important part in all our local communities.

15:59

Mr Andrew Welsh (Angus) (SNP): The Parliament clearly congratulates the past and present staff of libraries and museums throughout Scotland on their continuing hard work and efforts on our behalf. As I have seen at first hand the superb, high-quality modern provision, both rural and urban, that Angus Council's library service offers, I know what can be achieved by positive, efficient and forward-looking library staff who work with and for their local communities.

Born out of Victorian civic pride and based on

the principle of services for the instruction and recreation of the people, Scotland's libraries have made a massive intellectual and practical contribution to our society during the past one and a half centuries. With around 60 per cent of the population using public library services regularly, the Scottish people clearly understand the importance of libraries to our communities.

The best way to honour these 150 years of education, information and pursuit of knowledge is for this generation to ensure that our library system is based on an adequate foundation of investment and forward planning. Central Government policy must not only provide maximum access for adults but secure the future by specifically funding programmes for improving accessibility arrangements for parents and children. The chances are that a child who develops an early passion for reading will ultimately maintain that passion for life. The Executive's home reading initiative—read together—is a good step in that direction, but it fails to integrate parents and children into libraries fully and properly. Instead of focusing on libraries, the second phase is targeted, to my mind oddly, at bookshops, although giving funds to libraries would give greater opportunities for after-school activities and programmes.

There must also be an absolute commitment, which I would like to hear from the minister, to maintain free internet access in our libraries.

Dr Sylvia Jackson (Stirling) (Lab): Does the member agree that Stirling Council's library service's work with nursery schools and its putting its catalogue on the internet are moves in the right direction?

Mr Welsh: As a former councillor on Stirling District Council, I cannot help but agree with the member. I wish Stirling Council well in its initiative.

I welcome and support initiatives that are designed to increase public library usage, such as the print options and people's network campaigns. Unfortunately, the positive results from those programmes could be in jeopardy because of rising costs and Executive ring fencing. I seek the minister's assurances on both those issues. All too often, intelligent public services such as libraries are the first to face budget cuts so we must avoid the urge to drop the programmes before they reach maturity.

In England, forcing users to pay for public library internet access produced a 33 per cent decrease in use of services—I never want to see that in Scotland. Ensuring a continuing high level of accessibility will not only be of service to the Scottish people but will reinforce increased library patronage.

In the coming years, our library system faces

many critical challenges such as the need for essential building repairs and upgrades, especially in complying with the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. I hope that the minister will not stick to history but will look to the present and the future in outlining what positive steps he intends to take on those issues.

I want to hear from the Government how it intends to maintain access and services when it faces tight budget constraints. The minister must address the current lack of sustainability for the people's network and tackle fundamentals such as repairs, maintenance and upgrade of library buildings as well as cuts in book funds. How the Government chooses to act on those issues will determine the level of readership not only in relation to use of Scotland's libraries but in the population as a whole.

The best tribute that our Parliament can pay to our library system and its staff is to supply it with the means of working for the continuing instruction and recreation of the people. That is the history that we have inherited; we must turn that into reality and give it a future. In this instance, the future can and must be educated by the foresight of past principles. A public service for the public good is part of Scotland's tradition, which will serve the nation well if we have the wisdom and foresight to put it into practice.

16:04

Rhona Brankin (Midlothian) (Lab): I declare an interest as chair of the Scottish Library and Information Council. I welcome to the Parliament today in the region of 30 representatives of key library and information groups and heads of service from throughout Scotland.

The past three years have seen a massive injection of funding through the new opportunities fund. Indeed, a revolution has been going on in our public libraries across Scotland, at a time when the financial commitment of local government has been reducing. The media often portray public libraries as a stuffy, old-fashioned service where staff stamp out books, but the reality—as we all know and as we have heard today—is that our libraries deliver a diversity of services to the public. That has been well documented in the debate, which I hope will begin to dispel the media myth.

Importantly, public libraries support a range of Government initiatives, both national and local, whether in relation to lifelong learning, literacy, community development, culture, inclusion—whether social, rural or digital inclusion—or information and knowledge management. We also now have a network of Scottish Parliament partner libraries across Scotland, which brings the

Parliament closer to local communities, and which is a world first for the Scottish Parliament. Of course, MSPs are well served by the Scottish Parliament information centre, which is the Scottish Parliament's research and information service.

The diversity of the jobs that public libraries do contributes to people in our communities. We can choose from a whole list. In fact, all sorts of different things are going on in a public library near you. Whether they involve silver surfers, homework clubs, reading groups, services and support for the visually impaired and other disadvantaged groups, including asylum seekers and ethnic communities, housebound services, mobile libraries, health information or community-related information, all sorts of exciting developments are going on all over Scotland.

The development of the people's network has put public libraries back at the heart of the communities they serve. They offer real value to communities. Through new opportunities funding, there is a strong network that moves libraries across Scotland closer to providing equitable access to information, learning and reading. Indeed, the NOF recognises that that has been one of its most successful programmes to date and is keen to ensure that the investment is maximised. I take this opportunity to congratulate the Executive on its support for the people's network, but I also congratulate librarians all over Scotland on the incredible amount of hard work that was put in to deliver that huge project on budget and on time.

At the end of this financial year, new opportunities fund finances will run out. Sadly, many library services have seen cuts in their resourcing in the past five to 10 years, which have resulted in reductions in book funds and, sadly, reduced opening hours in some instances. That is against an increasing public demand for longer library opening hours.

There are a number of key challenges. The main issue is sustainability. How can the public library network be resourced and maintained to ensure that quality buildings, services, books and information are available on an equitable basis across Scotland? That is particularly relevant for the sustainability of the people's network services. For example, it is estimated that to continue to run the current information and communications technology infrastructure, the telecoms cost alone will be in the region of £3 million. That is a drop in the ocean in terms of Scottish Executive funding, but for library services it represents a huge mountain to climb.

There is also an important cross-cutting agenda for libraries and information services. There have been successful pilots within public libraries, but

the important point is that we need to be able to extend them across Scotland. For example, in North Lanarkshire, funding from the Scottish Library and Information Council resulted in an extremely successful project to take ICT and the internet to sheltered housing. One of the key outcomes was that residents could do their own shopping at Tesco and Iceland online, and have it delivered. The impact of that on the work of home helps was huge. Indeed, there were plans with social services to widen the service to other sheltered housing, but that has still to be achieved. It is important that we build on those successful pilots. We need to consider how the Scottish Executive handles cross-cutting initiatives and we need to ensure that cross-cutting work can support services at a local level, because libraries cannot easily be put in one box.

The consensus is that public libraries are a good thing but, despite legislation for local authorities to provide adequate library services, there is still no agreement on what is adequate, so we need to examine that.

There has been an early indication that library use is up between 10 per cent and 15 per cent and that libraries are attracting a wider range of users. We must build on that. We must also ensure that we revisit standards and quality in public libraries. Scotland's libraries are at the forefront of worldwide public library development and we must ensure that that remarkable achievement continues. We must have a quality improvement framework for public libraries.

There is a great story to tell about public libraries, but we still face challenges. I welcome this first ever debate on public libraries. It is a first for the Scottish Parliament and a first for public libraries.

16:10

Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I am pleased to speak in support of the Conservative amendment and, through the text of our amendment, the Executive's motion. For one minute I rather thought that I was at a Trades Union Congress compositing session when manuscript amendments were being made to change an amendment so that it could be acceptable.

The history of libraries in Scotland is essentially one of successful private enterprise on to which a public system has been grafted. Sydney Smith, one of the founders of the *Edinburgh Review* in 1802, said that Edinburgh was the best place in Britain for a literary man because of—Jamie Stone will like this—"good libraries liberally managed".

When the first public libraries bill was presented at Westminster in 1850, Scottish MPs got Scotland

excluded because of the excellent libraries that were already established in almost every burgh. As we have heard, it was not until 1853 that a subsequent bill was passed for Scotland.

The National Library of Scotland was established under that name in 1925, but its title simply recognised that the advocates library, the library of a private corporation, which the National Library of Scotland inherited, had been a national library in everything but name from its foundation in the 17th century. By the mid-18th century, when the philosopher David Hume was its keeper, the library already had 30,000 volumes, making it one of the largest libraries in Europe.

Interestingly, Hume started its collection of pornography. The first two titles that he ordered were French: Le Comte de Bussy-Rabutin's "Histoire amoureuse des Gaules", known as "The Love Life of Old France"; the second was La Fontaine's "Contes", a title which perhaps needs no translation.

The libraries of our four ancient universities are similarly libraries of private corporations that do not only serve the academic community but are, in the words of a 19th century parliamentary report, open to

"all respectable persons, properly introduced",

which would probably exclude me.

In Edinburgh and Glasgow, several learned libraries survive from an earlier age: the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh, founded in 1505; the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh, founded in 1681; the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow, founded in 1698; the Signet library, founded in 1722; and the Royal Society of Edinburgh, founded in 1783. Elsewhere in Scotland there have been libraries since at least the 17th century. Some are still in existence, but no longer active. Roseanna Cunningham mentioned Innerpefferay library in Crieff, which dates from 1680. The Leightonian library in Dunblane was founded under the will of Bishop Robert Leighton, who died in 1684.

Private philanthropy continued to play a role in the development of Scottish libraries through the trust founded by Andrew Carnegie, the Scottish-American tycoon. In 1883, the first Carnegie library was opened in his native town of Dunfermline.

The general point that emerges from all of that is that Scottish libraries are not, and never have been, a public monopoly. While it is fulfilling its responsibilities towards the public system, the Executive should take care to create conditions in which private philanthropy can continue to flourish to the benefit of all our libraries.

16:15

Mr Kenneth Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): I follow Roseanna Cunningham and Karen Whitefield's example and do a Stewart Stevenson by saying that my first job was as a music librarian at the BBC. I will not expand on that.

Everyone has their own experience of libraries and I do not know whether mine is typical. As a child, I used libraries to get books for pleasure; as a student, for study; and as an adult, for research and reference. I have now come full circle, because my children use our local libraries to get stories, picture books and, of course, videos. In that time, there is no doubt that libraries have been transformed. They are no longer just book lenders and providers of information; they are places to learn new skills, they are at the heart of local communities and they contribute hugely to the development of those communities and to our sense of community spirit.

I want to praise in particular the libraries in my constituency in East Renfrewshire. There are many examples of good practice throughout the country, but I know at first hand how good East Renfrewshire's libraries have been at responding to differing and sometimes competing demands and at developing new services. When one walks through the door, the libraries are chock-a-block with computer users and learners. They have taken a leaf out of the Waterstone's or Borders book and moved on from the dusty and severe places of the past and the mysteries of the Dewey decimal system.

The libraries in my constituency are bright, welcoming and inviting places that reach out to a new audience. An example of the services that they are developing is barrhead.com, a community website that has been developed by local people and supported by the library. Through the development of that service, those involved have learned and developed new ICT skills and have fostered a greater sense of citizenship as well as providing a functional service for the town. It was launched imaginatively, with a live camera link-up with Barrhead in Canada, although the locals did query the pronunciation of the town's name as "Bawheid".

In the limited time that I have available, I appeal to the Executive to recognise and build on the successes that I and others have outlined. I start by mentioning book funds, which are vulnerable to cuts. I hope that the Executive is sympathetic to the plea that all libraries need to maintain a critical mass of new and diverse books.

However, my main appeal is for the Executive to take a strategic approach accompanied by planned, long-term investment. A lot of our libraries recent successes have been based on

one-off or time-limited funding—for example, the people's network is supported by new opportunities funding. The first people's network in Scotland was opened in Giffnock in my constituency by the minister's predecessor and colleague, Allan Wilson. As Rhona Brankin said, the people's network that our library service has delivered is the only major Government IT programme that has come in on time and on budget. I echo her comments about the importance of sustaining the service.

Libraries have been successful at widening access and opening up learning opportunities, but they could do more. Libraries are neutral venues from which to provide Government services—people do not go there to pay taxes or bills—and, despite problems with the infrastructure of some buildings, they are often geographically well located in communities. Two weeks ago, Mearns library in my constituency held an open day at which local people could access the citizens advice bureau and the ethnic minorities law centre and get advice on healthy eating. The *pièce de résistance*—I say to Brian Monteith that I, too, can speak French—is that people can also regularly see their local MP and MSP in the library.

We need a second wave of investment and a clear strategy. The current performance indicators appear to be skewed. They pick up on the decline in book borrowing, but they do not measure libraries' success in reaching out to new customers, they do not reflect the range of activities that are on offer and they do not accurately capture whether new customers are coming through the door. If we want libraries to reach out to disadvantaged communities—as I believe we do—we should measure that activity and reward libraries when they do it well.

We have heard the minister's commitment, but lines of accountability are not clear. No civil service department is clearly in charge and libraries are overlooked as a result. Our approach to literacy provides an example of that. Libraries are already doing great things in relation to literacy, but little of the money that is spent on literacy seems to come their way. The same approach applies to "The Big Read". There is no clear role for libraries other than that which they create for themselves.

We need there to be clearer strategic guidance and support from the Executive and a move from short-term to long-term funding and we need local authorities to echo that policy. Libraries must be more involved in the community planning process, so that their contribution and potential can be maximised.

I ask the minister to reflect on those points and I look forward to the development of a strategy under his leadership in the coming months.

16:20

Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): In what has been an excellent debate, we have heard from several speakers about the widening and changing context in which libraries in Scotland operate today. It is entirely right that we celebrate the enormous contribution that public libraries in Scotland have made to all aspects of our public life. Over the years, libraries have been an empowering, liberating and—dare I say it—liberal force; they are part of what civilisation is all about.

That said, libraries are social and community jewels in the crown whose lustre dims if we do not polish them. I can echo Donald Gorrie's experience—I recall that, when I was a member of Glasgow District Council, the annual budget round was far too frequently marred by year-on-year reductions in the book fund, which was an easy target for administrations and council accountants. Such reductions were an apparently short-term cut, albeit one that had long-term consequences.

That process continues, as several members have mentioned. The central book fund grant to the National Library of Scotland is static; indeed, in real terms, it is declining. It is important to echo the comments that members have made about the need to have a long-term strategy and to take account of the importance of libraries to literacy, children, IT development and so on. I am aware that the changes that lie behind the problems that libraries have had are caused partly by greater emphasis on videos, CDs and internet technology and the explosion in book buying, but the picture is still a concern. I echo the comments that have been made about purchasing policy and the issues that the Scottish Publishers Association has raised, particularly those that relate to Scottish publishing.

I want to concentrate on an aspect that is slightly different from those that have been discussed so far, although it does reflect the social inclusion aspects that members have focused on—the extent to which public libraries fulfil their obligations to the whole of society and, in particular, to the blind and partially sighted. Many members will be aware of the Royal National Institute for the Blind's right to read campaign, which, among other issues, has highlighted the problem of accessing large-print and talking books.

In connection with that campaign, I was privileged to attend the launch of an event in the Mitchell library recently, at which the Lord Provost of Glasgow, Liz Cameron, gave a powerful speech in support of the cause that was being put across. In part, large-print books are a matter of what the publishers will publish, which is often a fairly minimal range of abridged versions. The way forward might well be new technology, such as the

new hand-held computer book, which has the potential to provide text in any required text form.

Libraries could tackle talking books and they should do so to a greater extent. Most productions come from the RNIB's stock, which is among the biggest in the world and can be accessed by subscription. The RNIB bears approximately half the subscription cost from its funding; the rest is paid for through the subscriptions of the individuals who access the service. Here is the rub: some councils subsidise some subscriptions through social work or other funds. In essence, access to talking books is stuck in the days of the subscription library. It is high time that the library service provided free access, as of right, to the RNIB talking book service and similar services for everyone who needs it, just as most of us have free access, as of right, to library facilities.

We talk boldly about inclusion, the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and the new Scotland, in which everyone has the right to access their potential. I ask the minister whether the Scottish Executive will consider a long-overdue move to amend the libraries legislation to require libraries to provide free access to the talking books that some people need to enjoy the same pleasure from literature, novels or non-fiction that their fully-sighted fellow citizens enjoy.

There are 300,000 people in Scotland who have serious sight loss, dyslexia or other reading difficulties. I am sure that other members would agree that one can imagine few worse things than losing one's effective sight and not being able to read a book. I hope that the minister will agree to examine the issue urgently, in the context of a further 150 years of library development.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): Christine Grahame can have five minutes.

16:24

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): I might not need five minutes, because I have pruned my speech so sharply, but I will do my best.

When I was 16, an English teacher said to me, "I don't think we'll be putting you forward for higher English—I don't think you're up to it." She had a very tough class; a lot of rammy went on at the back of the classroom and she spent her time trying to hold the fort. By accident, I went to the library nearby and came across critical works on Shakespeare and Chaucer. I had not known that such things existed. I just stumbled on them, but that opened up a whole new world to me. What the teacher could not provide, the library provided for me. I got my higher English—I got a merit—and the rest, as they say, is history. It is my own,

wee, personal history.

We must never forget that such things have happened along the way for many people and will continue to happen; however, they should not have to happen accidentally.

David Mundell (South of Scotland) (Con): Will the member take an intervention?

Christine Grahame: I will let David Mundell in later—I have five minutes.

Ten years later, I was in the small village of Minigaff in Galloway, where I was marooned with two toddlers. However, I was not quite marooned because, just after I moved there, the mobile library turned up and parked right next to the house. I went out with my toddlers and I had access to all the books there. I was also able to request books from main libraries.

The mobile library was also a community waiting point. Everybody came out from their wee houses in the village and crowded into the mobile library and had a chat and got their books. That is an important asset in rural communities. In fact, Scottish Borders Council has six mobile vans, two of which have just been replaced and the four others are to be replaced. The mobile library is an essential thing in rural communities for bringing the community together and for giving access to reading.

Later on—if we move on in my personal memory lane—I became a school teacher of English. I was determined not to be taught English in the way that I had been taught and I was determined never to say to children the things that had been said to me those years before. I made it mandatory that we had a library lesson every week. For the first time in that comprehensive school, the librarian and I gave a lesson on how to use the library. We wanted to make the library a place that people would not be frightened of. In due course, we even did the Dewey decimal system, so that young people in first and second year could understand how to use their library. If they then made fools of themselves, through not knowing where books were and everything, it did not really matter.

On librarians, I must say that they do not fall into the category of sheepish, mild people. Our librarian had a bun and she had glasses, but she was a wild, wild woman. I cannot tell members her name because she might find out, but she defended her right to have books in her library that others would have banned. She took a stance on that and was a proud woman. I have met other librarians along the way. If people want an exciting night, then call up a librarian.

A more serious issue, which has not been raised in the debate, is the use of our archives. In the Borders, we have the Selkirk archives, which have

some interesting wee things in them. They have grocery lists from 200 years ago—as today, one can learn an awful lot about people from 200 years ago from their grocery lists. They have everything there, including famous letters from Buchan, but the archives are in a damp, wee place and they are all disintegrating. None of that will ever be on the internet, thank heavens.

Finally, so that others can contribute to the debate, let me just make this point. We may be in the e-mail age and so on, but there is nothing quite like a malt, the fire, the sofa, the pouffe, one's feet up and a good library book in one's hands with three others there to read, two of which might be rubbish but there might be one gem in the middle of it.

16:28

Mark Ballard (Lothians) (Green): This afternoon's debate has been an important chance to look back on 150 years of public libraries, but it is important that we reflect on how little local authorities did 150 years ago. The fact that libraries became one of their responsibilities reflects the importance of libraries.

We have also talked a bit about the support for libraries that was provided by Andrew Carnegie and, especially in the city of Edinburgh, Thomas Nelson. My local library in Stockbridge was a Nelson library. However, it should also be remembered that many of those donations, including Carnegie's, were for buildings, not necessarily for books. As Robert Brown mentioned, there have been continual problems with local authority support for book purchasing. That issue has troubled libraries over the past 150 years.

There is a tension between libraries being places for education and lifelong learning and their being places for enjoyment. The discussion about libraries and the internet partly arises from that tension. Libraries must play a role in the information age. Libraries have always been at the forefront of new technology, from manuscripts to microfiche to the internet. It is important that such services should be available to all citizens, to make whatever use of them they want to make.

We welcome the people's network, which will bring and has brought new people into libraries. That is important, because that serves to involve more people in a library culture, which Christine Grahame talked about. In such a culture, people are familiar with libraries and with using them. The people's network can bring a new generation through the door.

I agree with Karen Whitefield that the internet will not replace libraries. Libraries are a key point of access for all to the information revolution. I

also agree with Christine Grahame that, whatever operating system or megahertz we have, we can read a book. Sadly, that is not always true of CD-ROMs.

As Chris Ballance said in his opening speech, we must be concerned about the falling number of library users and about the falling number of book loans. I was impressed by the statistic that Jamie McGrigor came up with that more people visit libraries than attend football matches. That is not necessarily how our culture is presented in the newspapers. It is important to reflect the central role that libraries can and do play.

Ken Macintosh and Jamie Stone discussed the idea of community hubs and the role that libraries can play in local authorities by allowing access to local authority information. I accept Ken Macintosh's point that the library should not be the place to pay bills, but it is the place where people should be able to find out about the full range of local authority services. I welcome innovative libraries such as the library in Glasgow that Chris Ballance mentioned, which has a sexual health drop-in clinic and a crèche. Such libraries can become hubs and community focal points.

One of the busiest public libraries in Scotland is on George IV Bridge, only a few steps from our offices. I have always found it a wonderful place to work, to research and to access information, and I am pleased that my new place of work is close to that public library, which I recommend to all members. If members want to live up to Enric Miralles's ideas about transparency, they could go to and be seen going to that library as an alternative to other places of research on George IV Bridge.

I cannot do a Stewart Stevenson because I have never been a librarian, but librarians are some of the most dedicated and patient people whom I have met when I have had information queries. I declare an interest, as both my parents-in-law are librarians. I know that they would want me to say what I have said about librarians, but I say genuinely that librarians are wonderful people for help with information.

Mr Monteith: Will the member give way?

Mark Ballard: I do not have time to take an intervention.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member is in his last minute.

Mark Ballard: In my last few seconds, I welcome the minister's agreement to our amendment. I hope that the consensus in the chamber about the benefits of libraries will be reflected in Executive action.

16:33

Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): It is appropriate for me to wind up on behalf of the Liberal Democrats, because I am the Harry Potter look-alike of the Parliament, or so I am teased, so I have a role to play.

The great feature of winding up is that, as everyone knows, it allows the speaker to sit through the whole debate. I have really enjoyed today's debate. I was not sure what I would hear, but I have learned quite a few things.

In fairness, excellent speeches have come from all parties. A plethora of dates and names has been thrown at us. Frank McAveety, the minister, referred to the University of Edinburgh's library of 1580. I thought that the library of the University of St Andrews, my alma mater, was older, but I will take the minister's word as gospel.

We have heard of Jim Wallace's library—the 1683 Kirkwall library—and of the 1725 circulating libraries, of Allan Ramsay's role, of Rod Stewart and of our man in a kilt, who is sitting with us in the chamber. Repeated references have been made to Andrew Carnegie, who is of enormous interest to me because his home, Skibo Castle, is in my constituency. I have nothing much to add about Andrew Carnegie, save to say that it is not commonly known that he was a very short man. His chair in his castle was built that little bit higher so that, when he sat at the table, he seemed a taller man than he was.

David Mundell: I am sure that Mr Stone would agree that it would be a travesty if the one library that was not mentioned during today's debate was the oldest library that still takes in new books and lends them out to the public. I am referring to the library that was established in 1793 by miners in the parish of Westerkirk in Dumfries-shire. Will he join me in commending Mr Arthur Bell, who Mr Gorrie did not mention, for all his work in keeping the library going and lending out books 200 years on?

Mr Stone: I commend Mr Mundell on an adroit intervention. Well done—10 out of 10 for that one.

Duncan McNeil intervened to raise the idea of the library service being a cinderella service, as did other members, including Donald Gorrie and Robert Brown. A lot of heartache is involved in decisions about the service. Those of us who have been in local government know that the library service could lose out.

Rosie Cunningham, who is—

Members: Who?

Mr Stone: Roseanna. Rosie? No relation, I assure members.

I suspect that what Roseanna Cunningham said

about internet access could cut either way. She was the first to flag up the big issue of disabled access. It is worth reminding ourselves that that issue will be upon us all shortly. All of us have received e-mails on the subject in respect of our constituency offices.

Jamie McGrigor spoke about the Scottish enlightenment. He also touched on the issue of computerisation in libraries, which I want to cover in my final remarks. He dropped one brick, I think, when he claimed that Bonar Law was a great Conservative. Bonar Law was probably a very nice man—a son of the manse—but he was a rather glum pipe-puffer. I do not think that he made a huge mark.

Mr McGrigor: You look like him.

Mr Stone: I think that the member is very much mistaken.

We have heard about amended, amended amendments. Chris Ballance talked about the fact that, over the past six years, there has been a 13 per cent drop in funding. He broadened out the argument on the subject of increased use, which is a point that Kenny Macintosh picked up on.

I have seen broader use being made of libraries in the Highlands. I am thinking of primary school painting competitions, for example, which have been exhibited in libraries. Such use brings children, mums, dads and grannies into libraries. It is one way of selling libraries. Many other things like that can be done.

As I said, Donald Gorrie talked about the problems of councils. He also flagged up the issue of the quality of books. After he said that, I wondered whether he meant fiction versus non-fiction, but I suppose that he was talking about good fiction, bad fiction and non-fiction—that sort of thing. Andrew Welsh made a good speech, as did Karen Whitefield. Andrew Welsh majored on the issue of accessibility. Rhona Brankin went on about the definition of an adequate level of service.

I would like to correct Brian Monteith. The man whom he referred to was the Comte de la Fontaine, who was a famous noble from Gascony, in case any other members should misunderstand him. I had been hesitating, but after Christine Grahame's comments about librarians, I am certainly going to the reception after 5 o'clock.

I have one last, serious point to make. When university students write an essay, they have to get books out of libraries. If they do not get into the queue quickly, the books are gone. All of us know that that is a fact. Although the internet cuts both ways, there is a case to be put to the Scottish universities that they should put the full range of books of one library on the net. I have seen too

many students losing out because they cannot get the books; they are in a poverty trap and they cannot afford to buy books. I appeal to the minister on their behalf. I ask him to encourage the higher academic institutions to do that.

The debate has been superb. Naturally, because I am on the Government side, I commend the Government motion to the chamber. I thank all the members who contributed to the debate.

16:39

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton (Lothians) (Con): Jamie Stone stressed the importance of access. I whole-heartedly concur with that view. I should mention an interest under the public lending right as an author. I also have an interest in the National Library of Scotland as an executor. Some of the papers of the author John Buchan have gone to the National Library and my wife is his granddaughter. Although the National Library comes under the Executive, the public libraries come under the local authorities. I will address their achievements.

Books can often turn out to be the memory of mankind. Great books frequently achieve distinction because, in a fascinating way, they highlight and bring to life shortcomings in the community or, indeed, developments of an evil nature that need to be confronted. "Oliver Twist" by Dickens gave prominence to the ill treatment that was meted out to orphans in Victorian England and "For Whom the Bell Tolls" by Hemingway gave an intimate understanding of the tremendous struggles that took place in the 20th century against the plague of fascism.

Other books relate to great adventures. A favourite of Scots schoolchildren is "Kidnapped", because it presents the brilliance and flair of the highlander with the steady conscientiousness, dedication, resilience and stamina of the lowlander and what an effective combination they can make. Donald Gorrie was right, therefore, to describe libraries as a powerhouse of lifelong learning.

Mr Stone: Does the member agree that the "Pickwick Papers" gives us an interesting insight into the corrupt electoral practices before the Reform Act 1832, which I believe his party opposed?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I think that it was Lord Shaftesbury who supported the factory acts when he was a Tory. Although a few skeletons are rattling around in the cupboards of many Scots—

Mr McAveety: And Liberals.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: And Liberals. I do not propose to delve too far in that direction tonight.

We have experienced a wholly unprecedented technological revolution. As a result, information that would have taken a very long time to find in years gone by can be obtained in seconds. Even the news of the great victory at Waterloo depended on its advent on carrier pigeons employed by the Rothschilds. Today, the internet and e-mail have a universality of appeal that is immediate. We have come a long way since Waterloo, but to maintain momentum, we need to keep on top of the most modern new technology.

Roseanna Cunningham stressed the importance of bringing about the necessary changes. First, we need to make the best use of videoconferencing. In Edinburgh, videoconferencing has been introduced as part of the people's network. The pilot project between the interpretation and translation services and a doctor's surgery will make it easier to give an effective service to Chinese-speaking patients without making it necessary to have an interpreter standing by. Videoconferencing will become more economic one day and it is undoubtedly a valuable way forward.

There are good projects in Scotland for providing access to the internet in public libraries; Andrew Welsh touched on that. The new opportunities fund has helped to provide resources for the people's network of more than £14 million with all 557 libraries involved. The network is on the right tracks and it should be supported.

The partner library network, to which Rhona Brankin and Ken Macintosh alluded, is rightly endorsed by the Scottish Parliament. The network supports 80 libraries and provides information about the Parliament to local communities so that information about the activities of MSPs at the Parliament and the decision-making process can be made readily available to all those who wish to know and not only to those who need to know.

I express gratitude to the Scottish Library and Information Council, which confirms that the successful implementation of the people's network project has seen the transformation of library services throughout our country. However, we should not rest on our laurels. Public libraries in the public interest are likely to deserve every bit as much support in the next 150 years as they have enjoyed in the past.

16:48

Mr Kenny MacAskill (Lothians) (SNP): We have had a wide-ranging and consensual debate, which, given the topic, is how it should be. There has been a considerable amount of special pleading on behalf of individual areas and specific libraries, but that is understandable.

It is right that the debate should have been wide-

ranging, because libraries are not static; they reflect the society in which they operate, the time and the medium that are available. That is why the points that were made by Karen Whitefield and other members about the provision of mobile libraries are reflective of the times. The rise of IT and other matters also reflects the era in which we find ourselves.

It is appropriate that the debate should have been relatively consensual. Although my colleague Roseanna Cunningham was correct to point out that we require more than platitudes, there is an acceptance that we are going in a specific direction and there is agreement and harmony in the chamber about recognition of where we have got to and the importance of what has been achieved. However, we require to advance and perhaps the difference of opinion will be about the emphasis and provision of resources.

The points that my colleague Andrew Welsh made are important. We need to ensure that we do not overload requirements on local authorities and that we balance requirements relating to local democracy. Funds might be provided to local authorities, but if they are required to scrape around to meet other requirements, there is a great danger that funding to libraries will be cut. Accordingly, we must ensure that resources are provided and that local authorities are not put in an invidious position. The Parliament must not pass the buck to local authorities.

Brian Monteith mentioned the role of the private sector. I have no objection to a role for the private sector, but public libraries must be publicly funded. There might be a role for private philanthropy—doubtless there is such a role—but there should be no requirement for it. We should not allow public libraries to be funded by private philanthropy any more than we should allow our national health service to be provided for by the national lottery. At the end of the day, we are talking about a state matter and delivery at local level.

We must recognise that libraries and literacy—of which libraries are a component part—are part of the great formation of the society in which we live. They are important to the communities in which they operate, as numerous members have said. Their contribution to Scotland's social and economic situation and where they can take us are also important. I subscribe to the philosophy of the two Rs—that running is the basis of all fitness and that reading is the basis of all knowledge—and I try, in a minimal way, to take both types of exercise. It is fundamental that we allow for such exercise.

Those who have read Arthur Herman's book on the Scottish enlightenment might perceive its perspective on the Act of Union as revisionist.

They will recall that he said that the single most important act to be passed by any legislature in Scotland was the Education Act 1696, which allowed direct access to the word of God and allowed Scots to have direct access to markets and the new world. We must bear that in mind.

We must consider the circumstances in which we find ourselves. I am mindful of the words and the wisdom that have been provided by Professor Henry Milner about civic literacy, the importance of the written word and libraries. I am a disciple of Professor Milner. We should applaud our libraries, but remember good practice elsewhere, particularly in Scandinavia. In Sweden, for example, every child is provided at birth not only with a gift of membership of their local library, but with a book that their parents can read to them to try, by that interaction, to encourage reading. I am also conscious, from Professor Milner, that we are at a juncture. We should decide whether to go down the Australian and United States of America road or the Scandinavian road and we should decide whether to recognise the importance of public support not only for public libraries, but for other media. It is important that we take cognisance of that matter.

I am conscious of time, but want to make a final point, which other members have touched on—the importance of modern Scottish literature. Such literature is important for our society because it reflects who we are. At one stage, there was a difficulty in Scotland, in that literature seemed to start with Scott and almost end with Stevenson, although a few worthy authors such as Robin Jenkins were mentioned. There is a great growth in the number of new young writers, but my colleague Roseanna Cunningham and other members have mentioned that the new writers do not seem to receive the support that they deserve. Of course it is important that funding should be available to support new writers, but it is also important that our libraries purchase their books. If we continue to operate under the current laissez-faire system, the free market is likely to drive them to sources that will purchase on a UK or wider basis and there will be a deviation from the requirement to purchase locally. Given that each book or pamphlet that is written is subject to a demand letter by the National Library of Scotland, is it not correct that, if the state seeks to insist that a person should provide a free copy to that library, the state should be prepared to ensure that we publicly acquire new works of Scottish fiction from new Scottish writers and put them in our public libraries so that our people can read them? It is important to take cognisance of that matter.

The debate has been good. Perhaps there is disagreement about emphasis and the pace at which we must go, but we should recognise benefits that have been achieved and that we

must build on. There is a wide world of literacy out there that we must support.

16:50

Mr McAveety: I echo the comments made by many members, who have indicated that this has been a wide-ranging and good debate on the issues that face our library service, both public libraries and other institutions that hold collections. Many members have raised critical issues that we must address over the coming period. Like Rhona Brankin, I pay tribute in particular to the work of SLIC.

The focus of today's debate is on the 150 years of public libraries. We must ensure that Scotland's first Parliament in 300 years recognises the role played by our predecessors in sustaining one of the most wonderful contributions to Scottish life—access to public libraries.

Much of the debate has been about how we move on and try to reinvent the service and inject new resources into libraries. Many members have, rightly, mentioned the people's network. That has involved a substantial injection of new money. Part of the contribution of the people's network is that in the business plan that was put forward local authorities had to take into account the sustainability of the investment in resources that came through lottery investment. I hope that we can have that critical discussion with Scottish local government over the next period to ensure that they fulfil that commitment.

The second key issue is the lessons that have been learned from the people's network. Many libraries that had perhaps lost their way have been redesigned, reinvented and reinvigorated because of the investment that they have received. That has put libraries back at the forefront of the debate at a local level. I do not want to centralise that debate. I am conscious of the issues that many people raise about a national definition of standards. I believe in the autonomy of local government to address those issues, but what we can do is work with SLIC and local government in the review of national standards to ensure that we address many of the points that members have raised in the debate.

Dr Jackson: As the minister says, there is awareness that there are problems about sustainability. For example, in Stirling the injection of funding from the new opportunities fund was for PCs and it trebled the number of PCs that were available. He mentioned that there will be negotiations with local authorities to examine the issue of sustainability. Can he help the library services by giving concrete details of the discussions?

Mr McAveety: I can give the assurance that in

the next few months I will have combined discussions with SLIC and local government. One of the areas of discussion will be how we address the mutual commitment that was made by the Executive and from within local government. I hope that those discussions will address many of the concerns that have been raised in the debate.

Another key point that has been raised is how we innovate within our information networks. One of the developments that has been alluded to is the way in which the National Library of Scotland will link up with other national institutions. Scotland is leading the way in trying to digitise the archive and the artefacts that we have in our displays. We want to ensure that through ICT developments those resources can be accessed more widely and can be accessed wherever someone is, in Scotland or beyond. We are leading the way to ensure that the knowledge that exists in Scotland is more widely available. That would not have been achievable without the expertise of key staff within national libraries and all those within the Scottish cultural resources access network—SCRAN. That is one of the major commitments that the Executive is engaging in, along with funding from the lottery.

Another issue that members have rightly touched on is the role of libraries in the development of literacy. I am happy to accept the amendment put forward by the Conservatives and to recognise that libraries are key players in developing literacy. The Executive is providing Bookstart with one-off funding of almost £200,000 for 2004-05 from the children and young people's interim grant scheme. That contribution will provide a Bookstart bag for every baby in Scotland in 2004-05. We are giving Bookstart support and it will apply for a five-year grant from NOF. That is a Swedish model that I am genuinely interested in.

We must also address the way in which libraries have transformed communities. Karen Whitefield spoke about the innovation in Airdrie in the 1850s and the leadership that was shown there well before it was shown in other parts of Scotland. She spoke proudly on behalf of her community and her constituency. We want to ensure that such innovation is a feature of the next period.

Members have given personal testimonies, but I do not want to comment on them in case people look back at my record at Springburn public library in the 1970s. However, in the mid-1990s, largely because of a very difficult budget experience, Glasgow City Council faced some difficulties. We had a choice between changing the terms and conditions of librarians and closing public libraries. I was the convener of the arts and culture committee at the time, and it was the most troubled period of my life as a public representative. Since then—six or seven years

on—a number of new initiatives have been undertaken. Local government funding has been much more stable. More important, leadership and vision has been established, both within the library service and in the political leadership of the council.

The real lesson that we need to learn about investment in libraries is that it has to be inextricably connected to the debate about the knowledge society that we all must participate in; to the social inclusion agenda; and to the lifelong learning agenda. I am sure that members of all parties who have entered the public libraries in Glasgow will recognise that it is a massively different experience now from the experience during the dark and difficult days of the mid-1990s. That is also true of the experience in many other local authorities in Scotland.

Following today's debate, we must start to win much more of the argument that resource allocation to libraries investment is a win-win situation and that the wider community can further engage with libraries to ensure their long-term sustainability. If people do not use the libraries, they will not continue for the next 150 years. Equally—and much more important—we must recognise that they are inextricably linked to the broader social developments that we want for our communities. In this afternoon's debate, many members have identified ways in which we want to move forward on that.

I pay tribute to those librarians—strict though they sometimes were—whom I met on my journeys to the library in the 1970s. The libraries have been a gateway to further improvement and development. I recognise the contribution that has been made by library staff, over the years, to ensuring that we have had a libraries network that has genuinely made a difference.

In the 1850s, when people first considered the issue, who would have thought that we would now be talking about libraries as one of the key areas for connecting into our national archives? Who would have thought that libraries would be one of our key tools for economic and social development? And who would have thought that libraries would be places where people could pursue other social activities, examples of which exist throughout Scotland? Where sport and leisure facilities have been integrated with library development, that has led to a substantial increase in the number of people who use those libraries—many more people than in previous projections.

Most important, because of the distinctiveness of Scottish education and Scottish society, what we must learn—not from Demos, whose report was, strictly, about the English library service and did not take into account the distinctive legislative

framework in Scotland—is that libraries need to be part of the wider changes to which we all aspire, irrespective of our political philosophy or ideology. Those men and women in the 1850s believed that libraries would be transformative. We have a responsibility, at national and local level, to continue to believe that libraries are still transformative.

Because working people were committed to that idea, I would like to end with a quote from Marx—not from Karl Marx, which might have pleased the SSP, but from Groucho Marx. He said:

“Outside of a dog, a book is man’s best friend. Inside a dog, it’s too dark to read.”

We have an opportunity to make a genuine difference. Every public library should contain the wonderful novel by George Friel entitled, “The Boy Who Wanted Peace”, in which the central anti-hero of the book, Percy Phinn, wants to educate young Hughie Savage in the intricacies of moderation in life. If every public library in Scotland had that novel and everybody had the chance to read the work of one of the great forgotten novelists, George Friel, the world would be a much better place. Let us hope that, in future, we can learn from those who made a contribution in the past.

I hope that I have made up the time, Presiding Officer. I thank you for your patience this afternoon.

Business Motion

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): The next item of business is the consideration of business motion, S2M-588, in the name of Patricia Ferguson, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a timetable for consideration of legislation.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) that the Justice 2 Committee reports to the Justice 1 Committee by 24 November 2003 on the Victim Statements (Prescribed Offences) (Scotland) Amendment Order 2003 (SSI 2003/519);

(b) that Stage 1 of the Antisocial Behaviour etc (Scotland) Bill be completed by 12 March 2004; and

(c) that Stage 1 of the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Bill be completed by 30 January 2004.—[Tavish Scott.]

Motion agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:01

The Presiding Officer: The next item of business is the consideration of two Parliamentary Bureau motions, motion S2M-586, on the office of the clerk, and motion S2M-587, on the suspension of standing orders.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Office of the Clerk will be closed on 29, 30 and 31 December 2003.

That the Parliament agrees that Rules 13.6.4 and 13.6.7 of the Standing Orders be suspended for the purpose of Question Time on Thursday 8 January 2004.—[Tavish Scott.]

Decision Time

17:02

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): There are 10 questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that amendment S2M-593.3, in the name of Fiona Hyslop, which seeks to amend motion S2M-593, in the name of Peter Peacock, on reforming child protection in Scotland, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

AGAINST

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)

Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marilyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 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)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Ms Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

ABSTENTIONS

Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division

is: For 33, Against 81, Abstentions 1.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The second question is, that amendment S2M-593.1, in the name of Mary Scanlon, which seeks to amend motion S2M-593, in the name of Peter Peacock, on reforming child protection in Scotland, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The third question is, that motion S2M-593.2, in the name of Rosemary Byrne, which seeks to amend motion S2M-593, in the name of Peter Peacock, on reforming child protection in Scotland, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)

AGAINST

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marilyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 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)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)

Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Ms Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

ABSTENTIONS

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)

Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 11, Against 81, Abstentions 23.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The fourth question is, that motion S2M-593, in the name of Peter Peacock, on reforming child protection in Scotland, as amended, as amended, be agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Parliament agrees that keeping Scotland's children and young people safe from harm and neglect must be a priority for all; agrees the importance of having a sustainable programme of reform of child protection services; notes the progress on the three-year child protection reform programme and future plans, and supports the Scottish Executive's decision to require local authorities, NHS boards and the police to review their practices in respect of child protection, take action where there are weaknesses, ensure that there are robust quality assurance processes in place and continue with initiatives to ensure that there are sufficient and well-trained social workers to meet current and projected needs; acknowledges the findings of Susan O'Brien QC's inquiry into the death of Caleb Ness, and as a result calls for greatly improved co-operation and communication between agencies along with new arrangements that encourage greater responsibility and accountability within the child protection system.

The Presiding Officer: The fifth question is, that amendment S2M-594.2, in the name of Roseanna Cunningham, which seeks to amend motion S2M-594, in the name of Frank McAveety, on celebrating 150 years of public libraries in Scotland, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)

Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

AGAINST

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marilyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 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)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMahan, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Ms Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)

Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

ABSTENTIONS

Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 27, Against 80, Abstentions 7.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The sixth question is, that amendment S2M-594.1, in the name of Jamie McGrigor, which seeks to amend motion S2M-594, in the name of Frank McAveety, on celebrating 150 years of public libraries in Scotland, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The seventh question is, that amendment S2M-594.4, in the name of Chris Ballance, which seeks to amend motion S2M-594, in the name of Frank McAveety, on celebrating 150 years of public libraries in Scotland, as amended, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The eighth question is, that motion S2M-594, in the name of Frank McAveety, on celebrating 150 years of public libraries in Scotland, as amended, be agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Parliament notes that this year marks the 150th anniversary of the Public Libraries Act in Scotland; congratulates public libraries on the diverse service they provide and, in particular, commends them for the success of the People's Network in encouraging even greater use of library facilities, congratulates Scotland's librarians but notes with concern falling visitor numbers and calls on the Scottish Executive and local authorities to do all they can to reverse this situation; notes that libraries have great potential as community hubs and that their outreach and social inclusion functions are vital and often overlooked and applauds those libraries that are imaginatively tackling these important issues, and further congratulates those libraries that have put their catalogues online and engaged

fully with new technology, enabling more of the population to access them, and praises local authorities for the part they play in providing this service and notes the importance that libraries play in improving literacy rates for people of all ages.

The Presiding Officer: The ninth question is, that motion S2M-586, in the name of Patricia Ferguson, on the office of the clerk, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees that the Office of the Clerk will be closed on 29, 30 and 31 December 2003.

The Presiding Officer: The 10th and final question is, that motion S2M-587, in the name of Patricia Ferguson, on the suspension of standing orders, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees that Rules 13.6.4 and 13.6.7 of the Standing Orders be suspended for the purpose of Question Time on Thursday 8 January 2004.

Women's Social and Political Union

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh):

The final item of business today is a members' business debate on motion S2M-481, in the name of Cathy Peattie, on the Women's Social and Political Union. The debate will be concluded without any questions being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament notes that, on 10 October 1903, a group of women met in the Manchester home of Emmeline Pankhurst and founded the Women's Social and Political Union, which became known as the suffragette movement, with the aim of recruiting more working class women into the struggle for the vote and believes that this centenary year should be marked by efforts to promote the participation of women in the democratic process.

17:07

Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab): I start with a quotation from Emmeline Pankhurst in 1912:

"We in the Suffragette Army have a great mission: the greatest mission the world has ever known—the freeing of one half of the human race and the saving of the other half.

I incite this meeting to rebellion."

A hundred years ago, there had been little progress since Mary Wollstonecraft had published "A Vindication of the Rights of Women". Women had no right to education at university—with or without the award of degrees—and no right to become medical doctors; married women had no right to property of their own; and no women had the vote. Reform bills came and went, extending the male franchise, but, despite attempts at amendment by John Stuart Mill in 1867 and Woodall in 1884, Parliament refused to extend the franchise to women.

The National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies—known as the suffragists—started in 1867 with branches in London, Manchester and Edinburgh. By the turn of the century, there were also branches in Glasgow, Dundee and Aberdeen, but the union had only limited success: women were allowed to vote in some municipal elections.

In 1903, the Women's Social and Political Union was formed in Manchester to extend the struggle for votes to working-class women. The *Daily Mail* tagged the women "suffragettes". They organised marches and demonstrations, and, after 1907, in frustration at the lack of progress, increasingly turned to civil disobedience.

In Glasgow, the Women's Social and Political Union was very much an organisation of the political left. Its establishment in 1906 happily coincided with the launch of a new radical weekly newspaper, the *Forward*, which provided a

platform for the campaign.

It is important to recognise the role that many Scottish women played in the votes-for-women crusade, and I do not have time to mention them all. Mrs Bream Pearce, or Lily Bell, was a regular columnist in the *Forward*. The Glasgow artist Helen Fraser was a national organiser who championed the cause of the suffragettes in by-elections in South Aberdeen, Hexham, and Kincardineshire, and in Montrose and Stirling burghs. Flora Drummond, known as “the general” because of her charm and great organisational skills, was often called on to organise large rallies and events. Indeed, she could be called an early spin-doctor.

Scottish suffragettes smashed windows, cut telegraph and telephone wires, poured acid in pillar boxes and set fire to public buildings. Women were imprisoned and some who continued their protests with hunger strikes were force-fed. Others were released to recover before being re-arrested to continue their sentence under the so-called cat-and-mouse act. Kier Hardie, speaking on the Prisoners (Temporary Discharge for Ill-Health) Bill, said:

“The endurance and heroism that these women are showing in prison equals, if it does not excel, anything we have witnessed on the field of battle or elsewhere.”—*[Official Report, House of Commons, 21 April 1913; Vol 52, c 52.]*

In early July 1914, a visit to Perth by King George and Queen Mary was met by suffragettes demonstrating against the use of forcible feeding in Perth prison. One of the hunger strikers who was around at that time was Janet Arthur, Lord Kitchener’s niece, who tried to blow up Burns’s cottage in Alloway. Having had no food or drink in Ayr prison for five days, she was moved to Perth prison, where three other hunger strikers were held. She later described her fate as follows:

“The wardresses held me down, and one of them reached forward and slapped my face ... the assistant doctor held my head in a most painful grip. Dr Watson then tried to force my teeth open with the steel gag, and said that if he broke a tooth it would be my own fault.

As he was unable to open my mouth he called for the nasal tube. He tried to force it up one side ... but with all his strength could not force a passage. He succeeded in forcing it down the other nostril, and left it hanging there while he went out of the room. As it was extremely painful, I asked the assistant to remove it, but he only laughed. Dr Watson returned and fed me.

The wardresses continued holding me down so that I couldn’t move, and the assistant doctor continued to hold his hands over my mouth and whenever the food came up tightened his grip to prevent me letting it out.”

With the outbreak of war, the suffragettes’ campaign abated. However, the contribution of women to the war gave added weight to their demands, and in 1918 women over 30 got the

vote. In 1928, the threshold was lowered to 21, the same as for men.

We owe those women so much, and I believe that we have a responsibility to continue their work. We do not have to chain ourselves to the railings, but we can continue their work through our democratic system to ensure that young women are nurtured and encouraged to enter political life.

There are still many battles to fight—to close the pay gap, to end poverty here and across the world, to achieve a more equal society and to remove the glass ceiling. To do all those things and more, women must have a key role as decision makers at all levels, yet so many women feel that their voices are not heard. Many women do not even vote. Women are active in communities and voluntary organisations, making their communities better places to live. We must find ways of encouraging them to participate in the democratic process. Most councils have a handful of women councillors; how can we bring them closer together?

I am proud to be a member of the Scottish Labour Party—the only party at the first Scottish Parliament elections to agree a 50:50 selection process. I am grateful to the Scottish trade union movement, the Scottish Trades Union Congress women’s committee and organisations such as Engender, which worked tirelessly not only for the establishment of a Scottish Parliament but also for 50:50 representation. The Scottish Parliament has the fourth highest representation of women in the world, but we must strive to ensure that young women are ready to take that work forward. In 100 years, so much work has been done, but there is still much to be done.

I shall close by singing a few lines by James Oppenheimer.

“As we come marching, marching, we bring the greater days,
The rising of the women means the rising of the race.
No more the drudge and idler, ten that toil where one
reposes,
But the sharing of life’s glories—bread and roses, bread
and roses.”

I am proud to bring this debate to Parliament today. *[Applause.]*

Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD): Encore!

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Christine Grahame to be followed by Marlyn Glen.

17:15

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): You have caught me on the hop writing my speech, Presiding Officer. That shows how busy

women are. Members will be glad to know that I am not going to sing—if I were to let them hear me singing in private, they would understand why.

A hundred years on, how much we take for granted and how far we still have to go. Cathy Peattie eloquently described what women went through to get the vote, but we now toss it aside lightly—by “we”, I mean society at large—and do not bother to go to the polls or register to vote, which is shameful. I do not quite believe that voting should be made compulsory, but something ought to be done, if only in memory of those people who fought so hard and suffered so much—the force-feeding, humiliation and vilification—to obtain it.

My first point is that the vote is precious, but I also want to talk about the young girls of today, who have a much harder time than I had when I was growing up and was liberated, as it were. At the age of seven or eight, young girls are put into clothing that makes them into young teenagers, and they are expected to see Britney Spears or Christina Aguilera as role models. That is not a problem, as we all have flim-flam in our lives—I still have some—but it becomes a problem when there is nothing but flim-flam and all efforts are concentrated on how one looks, how thin one is and whether one can look 35 when one is 55. The pressures on women are outrageous and they must be brought to an end.

Mary Scanlon will forgive me, but the only role model that was ever really on the political scene, was, of course, Margaret Thatcher, who had a privileged life, was well-off and had a rich husband—that is where I went wrong in life. She had her children looked after and brought in policies that were anti-family, such as taking milk away from schoolchildren and the introduction of the poll tax, which was both anti-family and anti-poorer people. Many more women than men fall into the category of being poor. Margaret Thatcher was not a good omen for women in politics, although we have redressed the issue, and many better women have been involved in politics since then. At the risk of being obsequious, I point out that some of them are in the chamber now.

Practical problems still exist. When I went to university, a grant and other support was available, but people do not have that support now. My parents had four daughters and one son and, given that I am the least troublesome of those four daughters, I think that the son was disadvantaged. That is hard to believe, but true—members should meet my sister who lives in Orkney. We had my father's support to develop careers if we wished although there was no pressure on us to do so. That still does not happen in some households in Scotland. I bet that some girls are still told, “Get away out and get a man

and get settled down,” which is what my granny told me many moons ago. Thankfully, I ignored that completely.

Apart from cultural issues, there are other practical problems. A mother cannot be wonder woman; it is not easy to arrange child care and have a career or a job. Children are not convenient and do not run to a timetable. When they are sick, it always happens at 4 o'clock in the morning, at which point the mother has to do something about work the next day. Somehow, women are expected to cope with such situations and still look as if they are 35 when they are 45. Some women are under huge pressures, although I am glad to say that I am not under them.

Although a lot has happened, I sometimes feel that the wheel has gone a little too far and that we need to backtrack a bit. Men and women are not equal; they are different and different things happen in their lives. People require aid with their differences so that they can have equality of opportunity. By saying that people are not equal, I mean that they are not the same. The Scottish Parliament has done well, but it could do more.

Am I running out of time, Presiding Officer?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I had envisaged that members would speak for about four minutes, but you can have up to five.

Christine Grahame: I will finish on this point, which I already touched on. Let us think of elderly women, many of whom do not get the full state pension because they never paid enough stamps, as they took time off to have children. They are often on benefits and as they live longer they have to rely on society for their care in the community. On those issues, which women understand, we could do more here and at Westminster to ensure that women have a legacy from those fair women of the past so that they do not still find themselves disadvantaged just because of their sex.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: If we run out of time, I will take it off the men.

17:20

Marlyn Glen (North East Scotland) (Lab): I am delighted that Cathy Peattie has secured the debate and I support the call to mark the centenary year of the WSPU with efforts to promote the participation of women in the democratic process.

We all share the same sense of outrage when we ask a woman about her voting intentions and she says that she never votes. However, sometimes women are persuaded to vote after a bit of encouragement and after hearing a bit of the history that we are remembering today, which it is important for us never to forget. Of course our

sense of outrage at non-voters stems from remembering when women were not allowed to vote. Every woman and man should recognise that long, hard struggle by always exercising their right to vote.

I will add a Dundee dimension to the debate. The Dundee branch of the WSPU operated in the early 1900s in the Nethergate and its organiser was a Miss McLean—no doubt at least a spiritual ancestor of our MSP Kate Maclean, in whose constituency the branch operated. The members did the usual things that radical political women still do—agitate, advocate and demonstrate. The more militant moved from heckling to smashing windows, egg throwing and, in some cases, even arson. Ethel Moorhead's first major act of political defiance was to throw an egg at Winston Churchill during a meeting in Dundee. She became the first suffragette in Scotland to undergo the horrors of force-feeding in 1914. I apologise if this sounds like a history lesson, especially to the Presiding Officer.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: It brings back 25 happy years in the classroom.

Marlyn Glen: I thought that it might.

The 1908 Dundee by-election saw Winston Churchill returned as MP. At that time, he was a left-of-centre Liberal, but his association with Dundee was neither happy nor long lasting. The Women's Freedom League used the occasion of the by-election to highlight the discriminatory nature of the franchise by producing mock polling cards for polling day. I am holding an enlarged copy of one of those cards. The card was designed to look official, but it had a stark political message. It tells women to take the card with them, but says that because they are women, they may not vote. It also bears a couple of slogans:

"Legislation without representation is slavery"

and

"Taxation without representation is tyranny".

It is unfortunate that those slogans still resonate in some parts of the world today.

Women were denied the vote altogether and that is the message that we should give women voters. It is all too easy to forget the steps forward that women made and how hard they had to struggle.

Members of the WSPU in its early years would have felt hugely satisfied if they had known that 100 years later not only would women have the vote and that there would be a few women MPs down the decades but that here in Scotland and in Wales so much positive action was being taken to make women legislators.

Turnout was dismal in the two Scottish

Parliament elections and the most recent Westminster general election, and young women make up one of the core groups of abstainers. That is not to say that young women are politically apathetic. The huge numbers of young women and men who took to the streets to demonstrate against the war in Iraq in February and the thousands who are involved in single-issue politics all have an interest that lies outside the current style of party politics.

The WSPU's ideals will be fulfilled only if we can bring those women into our political culture, so that they vote and take voting seriously and, more important, if we work with the same vigour for the rights of women who work outside politics with which we worked for the rights of women in politics.

We are in a privileged position in the Parliament and each of us needs to continue the struggle in our parties to promote the participation of women in the democratic process. The Equal Opportunities Commission has produced a handy guide for political parties to help them through the promotion, selection and election of women candidates, so we do not have any excuses, because it is all written down for us. However, it is not just about the democratic process—we have to work throughout society.

I endorse the 50/50 campaign, the aim of which is to increase the access of women in Scotland to power and influence across society and within decision-making bodies at all levels—in the UK Parliament, local government, health and enterprise boards, and in all public appointments. The list is long. It is largely up to us to see that it does not take another 100 years before we can say that equality has been achieved.

17:25

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):

I thank Cathy Peattie for the debate, and for reminding us of the struggle by women. I must admit that I did not enter politics to fight for women or feminist issues. I have not thrown eggs or broken windows and I gave up trying to look 35 some years ago, but I am pleased to speak in this debate.

I am proud to belong to the party that produced the first female MP and the first female Prime Minister. From grocer's daughter to Prime Minister and a highly respected politician on the world stage, it is fitting to acknowledge today the contribution of Mrs Thatcher to our politics and history. It is also fitting to note that Mrs Thatcher went round many constituencies before she was selected as a candidate. She was certainly not brought in through any source of influence.

I thought it would be pertinent tonight to remind

members of my experience when I went after my first seat. It was 1989, the seat was North East Fife and I was delighted to become the candidate. I owe North East Fife Conservative Association an enormous debt of gratitude. The association invited along 14 men and me, as the token woman. I still have the letter that asked me to bring my wife that night—they forgot that the letter was being sent to a woman.

At the recent Conservative conference in Blackpool, I was pleased to attend a fringe meeting by the Fawcett Society and MORI, which our then chairman Theresa May attended. She confirmed that the Conservative party is examining its selection process. At that public meeting she said that candidates will no longer be selected on the basis of tub-thumping speeches, and that much more emphasis will be put on their ability to deal with cases of domestic abuse in their surgeries. We may not be moving towards a 50:50 split, but there is recognition of the contribution that is made by women, and of what the Conservative party is looking for, not just from women, but from male politicians.

As Cathy Peattie said, in the world league table of proportions of female representation, Scotland is now in fourth place. We are bettered only by Sweden, Wales and Denmark. Today, we should not forget that women now lead councils in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Fife, Tayside and Highland, although undoubtedly there is considerably more scope for female participation at local level, given that only 22 per cent of Scottish councillors are women, compared with 39.5 per cent of MSPs.

Sarah Boyack (Edinburgh Central) (Lab): Mary Scanlon just made the point that I was going to ask her to clarify. Although we have some superb female politicians leading at local council level, we need an awful lot more women coming in behind them. I hope that we can all agree on that in this chamber.

Mary Scanlon: Yes—it is important that 22 per cent of councillors are female and that some of our leading councillors are highly respected women.

We do not need women simply to come to the chamber to put forward women's and family issues, although that is welcome. I was delighted to secure a members' business debate on men's health. Perhaps some of our male MSPs found that difficult, but it is right for good and effective female MSPs to raise issues across the whole spectrum, in particular issues such as men's health.

Cathy Peattie listed many heroines in her speech and I hope that the Parliament will continue to have a large representation by women; indeed, that representation increased at the election in May. I hope that one day a female MSP

will become First Minister and perhaps even Presiding Officer.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am not sure whether I should rule that out of order.

17:30

Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab): I start by welcoming the honourable Esterina Kilasi MP from Tanzania, who is in the gallery this evening. [*Applause.*] Tanzania has 20 per cent representation by women in its Parliament.

I congratulate Cathy Peattie on securing a significant and poignant debate. The struggles and achievements of the suffragettes at the beginning of the 20th century are well recorded and should not be underestimated. Debates such as this are important in that they serve to remind us of that fight. As time passes, there is a danger that the struggle will, in the eyes of some, lose its relevance and become a relic of a forgotten age when women had to fight for their right to participate in the democratic process, even at the most fundamental level. It is important that we try not to let that happen.

Analysis of modern elections indicates that those who are familiar with the struggles of the suffrage movement—the older generation—continue in the face of falling voter turnout to see the importance of participating in the electoral process by using their vote. Older women are well aware of the sacrifices that were made by the suffragettes, but younger women are less familiar with that history, as Marlyn Glen pointed out. When I meet with the response “I never bother to vote” during election campaigns, I often find myself having to give a short history lesson and plead with people to use votes that were hard fought for and won.

Voter apathy is a term that is much used to describe low turnouts at elections. However, that excuse is a bit too convenient and easy. We should ask why voters are apathetic. People can be motivated and turn out in large numbers when an issue is seen as important and they believe that their actions might help to achieve change. We can cast our minds back to February and the people who marched against the war.

The concept of value remains essential to the voting process. In order to restore voter turnout, we have to work to restore the perceived value of the vote. Many people feel that they are disfranchised from society because of poverty, deprivation and despair. In the case of women, many still feel that they are marginalised and excluded from political and public life because of structural inequalities. The introduction of easier ways of voting will not on its own provide a

solution that will increase voter turnout; it will not do much to increase women's representation in political and public life.

That might be done by tackling the inequalities in society and by proving—by deeds, not words—that politics is relevant to ordinary people and that elected members of parliaments and councils are making a difference to everyday life. The first Scottish Parliament elections saw a huge intake of women, mainly in the Labour party, where a 50:50 balance was achieved.

Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP): I point out that in the first session of Parliament, the SNP delivered 40 per cent of its representation by women. We did not use positive action, although many of us argued for that. Part of that success was due to our making the argument, which is as important as delivering the mechanism. Action is necessary in some parties; in others it is the argument. Either way, we have to achieve a result.

Elaine Smith: I congratulate the SNP on the representation that it achieved. It took action by just having the debate, as Fiona Hyslop said.

We now have almost 40 per cent representation by women in Parliament. In the current system of party politics, the parties are the gatekeepers and the action that they take, or do not take, directly influences levels of representation. Labour's 50:50 balance was no accident; rather, it was the result of many years of struggle by women in the Labour and trades union movement that produced the system whereby seats were twinned. The new Parliament was an ideal opportunity to do that because there were no incumbents or candidates who had fought seats for years—there was a clean slate.

However, the women were not parachuted into their seats. They had to go through selection, a robust hustings process and a vote by the membership. That process created a level playing field on which women were selected in the same way as men.

Women's representation is important not only because women make up over 50 per cent of the population, but because the critical mass of women is proven to make a difference to the policies and practices that the Government employs. I would have gone through a list of such differences but I do not have time. Perhaps Margaret Curran will mention some of them in her closing speech.

It is not an exaggeration to say that women have to work harder to prove themselves. Esterina Kilasi tells me that she thinks that she has to work twice as hard as the male member who held the seat before her. We cannot change the situation overnight but, in the spirit of the suffragettes, we must continue to try. Only then will true equality be

achieved.

My final point is that we, like the WSPU, need our male colleagues to engage with our aims for equality. Keir Hardie was almost an honorary suffragette—he helped their cause and he scarcely made a speech without calling for women's enfranchisement. When asked to write a motto, he chose:

"Votes for women and socialism for all".

I would like to update that to, "Equality for women and socialism for all".

17:35

Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD): As members may have noticed, I am not a woman, but I am privileged to take part in this important debate.

I was well brought up: I had a grannie and three aunts who were suffragists—as opposed to suffragettes; I think that there is a distinction—and who were active in the legal wing of the women's movement. I have at home the autobiography of Mrs Pethick-Lawrence, who was one of the leaders of the non-Pankhurst wing—as we might call it—of the women's movement. The book describes one of my aunts as

"our champion newspaper seller in Scotland".

One of the ways in which the women's movement was a pioneer was in the production and sale of its own newspaper. The movement developed the approach that is now taken by political parties, which publish the news that they cannot get newspapers to publish. Those newspapers were important.

The National Library of Scotland has a small collection of photographs of people who were involved in the suffragette movement that were collected by my aunts. The photographs demonstrate that we have more to learn from the movement. Many show the fancy dress parades that the women's movement often held. There are photographs of, among other people, Flora Drummond, who was a very impressive female. If she was put in charge of the Scottish football or rugby teams, we would do a damned sight better than we do at the moment. The photos show a lot of splendid-looking women in fancy dress. One of my aunts used always to dress up as Mary Queen of Scots because she was tall and red-haired. I think that we might engender some interest in politics if we went in for fancy dress parades, rather than our dull approach.

Fiona Hyslop: Although I come from Linlithgow and have some red in my hair, if the member thinks that I am going to dress up as Mary Queen of Scots to get votes for women, I am afraid that he is mistaken.

Donald Gorrie: As we are in Edinburgh, I must mention Elsie Inglis, who was a leading suffragette as well as a medical pioneer. The Scottish women's movement was involved in Scottish women's hospitals—indeed its members moved almost en masse into the hospitals, as doctors, nurses and helpers. Members probably know the story of how Elsie Inglis went to see a general in London to offer to establish a hospital in France to help with the wounded. She was told to go home and be quiet. However, she established hospitals, first to help the Serbians, then the Romanians and later the French, but not the British—but British men are pretty stupid, as many members realise.

The women's movement was part of a wider campaign to give women a fairer deal in life. As members have said, that work continues and I am well aware that the playing field is still uneven, not just in politics but in many areas of life. We must keep working on that.

The things that helped women the most were the typewriter, the bicycle and the contraceptive. However, a lot of other things—

Christine Grahame: Will the member take a very quick intervention? He has missed out the washing machine, which is far more important.

Donald Gorrie: The member may certainly add the washing machine to the list.

A lady Scot was the first woman golfer to do a full swing, instead of a sort of half swing. That is a trivial thing, but it illustrates the sorts of breakthroughs that women had to make. There are still many breakthroughs to be made in order to give women a fair deal. I am aware that my party has a dismal record on representation by women here and at Westminster. We have good representation at council level in Scotland and England, but we must address the parliamentary situation.

The subject of the debate is splendid and more people should know about it. We should all keep going to try to create, as far as possible, a level playing field for men and women.

17:40

Mark Ballard (Lothians) (Green): I welcome the opportunity to discuss the legacy of the WSPU. I very much agree with the sentiments of Cathy Peattie's motion and thank her for lodging it.

For democracy's sake, women must be involved in the political process—now as then. That must be part of a wider process of broadening access to, and involvement in, our democratic process. If members will forgive me for saying so, politics is too often seen as a white, male, middle-class and middle-aged game. I score three out of four at the moment.

We should look back at why the WSPU was founded. Its foundation was prompted by dissatisfaction with the political process—a feeling that, in spite of Keir Hardie, the Labour Party was often too lukewarm in its support for women's suffrage and that the existing suffrage movement was too close to the mainstream parties and too cautious in its politics. The WSPU attracted many working-class women, particularly in Scotland. Cathy Peattie and Marlyn Glen have outlined some of the links with the socialist co-operative and labour movement, but we should remember that the WSPU is most famous for its direct action tactics.

When I was at school, I learnt about Mahatma Gandhi and the direct action and civil disobedience that he was responsible for in India as part of the campaign for emancipation of the people of the Indian subcontinent. It is a shame that I did not learn about what happened in my country—the direct action and civil disobedience that took place here a century ago in support of the emancipation of half the population of this country.

Cathy Peattie mentioned some of that direct action, which included the smashing of windows in Government buildings, the slashing of pictures in art galleries and, especially in Scotland, the attacking of postboxes—which were a symbol of the Government—with acid. As frustration grew about the fact that the existing political system was not able to respond to or to listen to the views of women, the scale of arson and attacks on property gradually mounted. As has been said, that campaign was successful in the end.

What I have read about the suffragettes often downplays the direct action; more is made of the work that women did during the war. The idea that women were not working before the war—

Cathy Peattie: Women have always worked.

Mark Ballard: Exactly—working-class women have always worked, whether at home or in factories. Women have always been working, but there is a tendency to say that they were given the vote because they worked in munitions factories during the war. That downplays the importance of the direct action movement.

I want to pay tribute to the women who have been involved in direct action in the peace movement. It was the peace movement that brought me into politics; that movement is still dominated by women. In particular, I want to pay tribute to Angie Zelter, Ellen Moxley and Ulla Roder for the direct action that they took as part of the campaign against the Trident military base at Faslane. That direct action is in the spirit of the direct action that the suffragettes took. We ought to celebrate women and direct action then and now.

I thank Cathy Peattie for lodging the motion. It is important to remember that the political process does not mean just the party-political process; there is a huge tradition of extra-party and extra-parliamentary activity. Finally, I thank Cathy for singing "Bread and Roses".

17:45

The Minister for Communities (Ms Margaret Curran): Deputy ministers usually respond to members' debates but it will be noticed that I won the argument with Mary Mulligan, so I am pleased to be here to respond to a subject that is of obvious critical importance. I begin by thanking Cathy Peattie for lodging the motion for tonight's debate and I pay tribute to her excellent speech. As a history graduate, I think that tonight has demonstrated a fascinating grasp of history among my colleagues. It has been extremely interesting indeed.

The Women's Social and Political Union represents something very significant for those of us who are involved in politics. Where we can, we want to honour their contribution to the political emancipation of women. We have a real attachment to that period of history because it seems to symbolise the struggle for the political emancipation of women. Although none of us would make any claim to rank alongside them in our perhaps more humble contributions to the political process, we see ourselves as carrying on that tradition. People might take different interpretations of how they see themselves in that, but I believe that that history is important.

I recognise what many have said about the lack of women who vote—I will perhaps speak about that later—but, when we knock on doors or when we are canvassing at the polls, there are women who tell us, "I always vote because women died to get me the vote." People feel that very strongly. It is critically important that we remember that history, which is something that we should cling to.

We know that the issue is not just about the vote, as Elaine Smith said. A number of the suffragettes—Sylvia Pankhurst in particular—saw the vote as the means to achieve the wider liberation of women in order to change and improve women's circumstances. That is obviously significant to our attempts, but the issue is also about the representation of women. All of us now recognise and have as an established aim the need to have equal representation of women. I am pleased to hear about the progress in the Conservative party and I congratulate the women who have struggled there to achieve that.

However, it is clear that if we were to take our eye off the ball, the situation could easily slip back. While recognising that none of us want to get into

any party-political point scoring, I would say that I am proud of what the Labour party has achieved through the 50/50 campaign. As women in the Labour party, we are disappointed with progress at Westminster. Not enough work has been done there. The 50/50 campaign has been flagged up by many women tonight, but the campaign is on-going. It was not just about the Scottish Parliament, but continues to be about other legislatures and other forums for decision making that women should be part of. We want to encourage women to be part of broader Scottish and British life. We should always remember that the situation could easily fall back if we do not keep ourselves focused on that agenda.

We also know that we need a broad agenda about what women's issues are. Elaine Smith flagged up that point. As Christine Grahame said, it is about culture. We need to look at our own culture and at what opportunities we are creating for women. We have had many debates about violence in the chamber, but having a focus on women gives us an understanding of that. We also know about education and the work that is going on. It is important that we keep the women's agenda alive. Although I am sure that the suffragettes would look down on us and say, "Well done, girls," for doing so well in the Scottish Parliament, they might be a wee bit disappointed both that it took us quite so long and that we are still having to work so hard to maintain that in other places.

Fiona Hyslop: The minister mentioned the need to keep the women's agenda alive. Over the summer, I saw a report that said that the minister was keen to ensure that the women's agenda was pursued by the Executive. In the remainder of her speech, perhaps she can share with us what that is likely to be.

Ms Curran: I was about to come on to exactly that issue, so I thank Fiona Hyslop for that useful introduction. Part of the agenda is about broadening the participation of women.

However, before going on to that, I want to make one point about the Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Act 2002. We in the Labour party understood that, if political parties were not allowed at least to choose to have mandatory mechanisms, that breakthrough will never be achieved. I accept that there are other points of view and I understand the logic of the point that was made earlier, but that is for other parties to decide. However, the fact that political parties can now adopt such mechanisms is significant.

As an Executive, we want to use powers in any way that we can to broaden the participation of women in public life. Part of the remit of our widening access progress group will be to consider how to take forward work on encouraging

women in local authorities and, more broadly, in public bodies.

I will move on to talk more particularly about work that we are doing. As Elaine Smith said, we must be careful not to make a superficial analysis of why women are not involved, do not vote and do not have the influence that we want them to have. We know that that relates to basic matters such as the domestic work that they undertake and their child care responsibilities.

Child care remains an important element of the work that we are doing. In all my work to develop strategies on social justice and on giving people more access to opportunities, child care emerges again and again as a key issue. We know that mothers do twice as much child care as fathers do and that we need, in a sense, to liberate women and to have proper child caring strategies in our society. Deep down, men and women need to come to terms with the fundamental challenges in how they view work and their lives.

Christine Grahame: We are in a consensual debate. I am sometimes concerned that women feel that they must use child care and go out to work. I would like some emphasis in this Parliament and in that other place on financial encouragement for women to be at home with their children if they wish to be. Will the minister comment on that?

Ms Curran: I do not want to become involved in political point scoring. The Treasury is working to ensure that women can make the choices that they wish to make. The tax and benefits system is the proper way to address that. I have never subscribed to the campaign for wages for housework, because that might legitimise some discrimination against women—that can be debated. Perhaps the tax and benefits system could be used more to deal with the situation. In addition, services should be provided for women that allow them to make effective choices at various stages of their lives.

The way in which our culture views child care has shifted considerably, but I am sure that I speak on behalf of the many working mothers in the Parliament—I often think that we should establish a therapy class to assuage our guilt and to deal with our occasional struggles—when I say that a fundamental issue is the work-life balance. Many of us try hard to ensure that we have working processes around us, not to deal with exhaustion on our part, but to allow us to lead full lives. That was part of the campaign and why we wanted to be here.

We wanted to become MSPs not only because we wanted more women around the place, but because we wanted to change Scotland to ensure that it operated in women's interests. Working

ourselves to death at all hours and not caring for our children is not a good place for men or women to be. The more we fight to be with our children, the more we do a service to our daughters and sons who follow us. That is the work-life balance with which we must come to terms.

I will talk quickly about what the Executive is doing to tackle issues and I will focus on a few measures. We have talked about the women's fund for Scotland before. Two big developments have occurred, one of which is the establishment of a Scottish women's convention. Engagement was needed with women's organisations throughout Scotland to ensure that they produce a range of policies. I could talk about those policies, which range from subjects such as violence and harassment straight through to child care. In a sense, I commissioned those organisations—if they would allow themselves to be commissioned—to present detailed policies that require Executive action.

The Executive also established the strategic group for women, to which Fiona Hyslop alluded. That was a small group of informed women who have worked on different aspects of the issue for some time and had a perspective on what the Executive should do. We have just received that group's report. The group will launch the report at the end of this month, after which we will respond to it. We will have to address a comprehensive range of matters as a result of that report.

Our commitment must be on-going. I do not want to go through the list of issues that we are dealing with, because it is considerable, but I am happy to talk to anybody who is interested.

I thank Cathy Peattie again for securing the debate. She and I have worked together for many years on the issues that have been discussed. She and I have fought many a battle and won some, along with Marlyn Glen, Sarah Boyack, Karen Whitefield, Elaine Smith and many others who are here tonight. We were returned to Parliament to continue the debate here. I pay Cathy Peattie the tribute that she deserves for her work over many years and her continuing commitment to the agenda in the Parliament.

When things get hard, when we are up against resistance to our agenda and when we are dealing with child care issues and changing the institutions in which we work, perhaps remembering the inspiration of the suffragettes and their bottle helps us to maintain the force that we need to continue the agenda.

Meeting closed at 17:55.

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