

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Thursday 11 March 2004

Session 2

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Scottish Parliament

Thursday 11 March 2004

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

Pensioner Poverty

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): Good morning. The first item of business is a debate on motion S2M-1020, in the name of John Swinburne, on pensioner poverty, and on three amendments to that motion.

09:30

John Swinburne (Central Scotland) (SSCUP): All political parties are starting to worry. The hitherto placid pensioners are on the move. Grey power is sending out the message, and pensioners are starting to realise that they are capable of exercising political power. That will increase year after year, as the demographic time bomb keeps ticking.

During this parliamentary session there will be 1.18 million pensioners. The Scottish Executive must therefore do the right thing and eliminate pensioner poverty, or it will pay the price at the ballot box. In all caring societies, the elderly are held in high esteem. Indeed, their influence and guiding hand is greatly appreciated. Unfortunately, that is not the case in modern Scotland. All too often, pensioners are regarded by those in authority as an ever-growing drain on public resources. My generation still has a great deal to offer. On reaching retirement age, we do not automatically become incapable. For example, it is estimated that in excess of 76,000 carers in Scotland are over 65, and 27,000 of them are over 85.

The fact that the Parliament has agreed to debate pensioner poverty is a small step in the right direction. At the same time, it is also an indictment of this and past Governments for failing to anticipate the present situation. Research by the Family Budget Unit recommends that a straightforward, across-the-board increase in the basic state pension from £77.45—which represents only 17 per cent of average United Kingdom earnings—to £160 a week, index-linked to earnings, would solve that problem and would eliminate the need for costly means testing. The money should be paid to men and women—the practice of giving 50 per cent to the spouse is unacceptable. A weekly payment of £160 equates to only £4 per hour for a 40-hour working week,

which is less than the minimum wage, yet still I hear the cries of “impossible” and “impractical”.

A university study arrived at £160 as being the absolute minimum that a pensioner would need simply to keep body and soul together. It would not allow for any luxuries whatever. Due to the low wage structure during their working life, the majority of today's pensioners simply could not afford to save for their retirement. The right to buy has meant that many thousands of council tenants are owner-occupiers, with the consequential demand to maintain their properties. On current pensioner income, such maintenance is not viable, resulting in a deterioration in pensioners' homes and an increase in the poor health of their inhabitants. There is insufficient affordable accommodation for rent for the numbers who require it. Sheltered housing caters for more than 34,000 pensioners, while nearly 16,500 amenity houses are provided by local authorities. Those figures represent 5.3 per cent of the pensioner population in Scotland. For private sheltered and retirement homes, of which in excess of 5,500 presently operate, the future is bleak, as can be observed by the recent and continuing closures due to inadequate funding.

Not all senior citizens are poverty stricken. Five per cent are very well-off, and 45 per cent are comfortable; it is the bottom 50 per cent that gives me cause for concern. The bottom 25 per cent live below the Government's poverty level. Fortunately for them, they receive council tax relief, rent relief and access to full pension credits, which, from 12 April, will give them £105.45 a week. Using the Government's own terms, they have been lifted from absolute poverty into relative poverty. The next 25 per cent of senior citizens are caught in a poverty trap. Their state pension, plus their works pension or savings, takes them to above the £139.10 threshold. They are on their own. They get no help from the state and are required to pay full council tax—the same amount as the house next door, which could easily have a household income well in excess of £1,000 a week.

The Labour-Liberal Democrat coalition deems the council tax a fair and equitable way for local authorities to raise their income. The coalition says that the system must be property based to some degree. That is why I welcome the Scottish National Party's paper on local income tax, which is a mirror image of the Scottish Senior Citizens Unity Party's election manifesto pledge. The problem and the solution are currently reserved to Westminster, yet the UK Government allocates only 5.1 per cent of its gross domestic product to pensions, and Gordon Brown has stated that that will fall to just over 4 per cent. The UK spends less on pensions than nearly every other country in Europe, and its projected spending will decrease when compared to hugely increasing

commitments—nearly 16 per cent—by France and Germany.

Pensioner poverty is a fact of life. As politicians, it is our duty to relieve that iniquitous burden on those who have contributed so much to our well-being. Fiscal autonomy would give the Parliament the power to do that—the sooner it comes along, the better.

There was an interesting item in the newspaper yesterday. The Adam Smith Institute proposes a doubling of the pension, which would take it to roughly £155. The only thing that I do not agree with is its proposal to raise the pension age to 68.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees that pensioner poverty must be eradicated.

The Presiding Officer: I call Mary Mulligan.

09:36

The Deputy Minister for Communities (Mrs Mary Mulligan): I will move the amendment formally and make comments after I have heard the debate.

I move amendment S2M-1020.3, to insert at end:

“and congratulates the Scottish Executive for closing the opportunity gap for Scotland’s poorest pensioners; welcomes Executive policies that are helping pensioners to save money on heating their homes effectively, providing assistance with bus fares and continuing free personal and nursing care, and supports the Executive in encouraging pensioners to claim benefits that are rightfully theirs, such as council tax benefit, through the central heating programme, and through disseminating information to local authorities and old people’s organisations.”

09:37

Shona Robison (Dundee East) (SNP): I welcome this morning’s debate and thank John Swinburne for bringing such an important topic to the Parliament.

John Swinburne has already outlined some statistics, but the one that sticks in my mind is that one in five pensioners lives in poverty—a ridiculous and unacceptable situation in a country such as Scotland, which has so much potential and is so energy rich. However, to make those resources work for pensioners in Scotland, we need control over the real levers of power that can affect pensioner poverty, such as pensions, tax and benefits. Without that control we can only tinker at the edges of pensioner poverty, but with it we could do so much to tackle the real issues. The Parliament could begin to address those, such as restoring the link between pensions and average earnings. It is somewhat ironic that the Conservatives now want to restore that link, given that they broke it in the first place.

I suppose that the Conservatives are at least trying to make amends, which is more than Labour has done. Labour has well and truly ditched its manifesto commitment to restore the link between pensions and average earnings. The SNP will hold true to its commitment to restore that link, but the Parliament requires the powers to be able to do that. If the situation is not turned round, we will be heading for a pension crisis, with many more thousands of pensioners living in poverty. The situation will be made worse by the failure of the Pensions Bill at Westminster to give compensation to employees whose pension fund has collapsed—an opportunity well and truly missed.

As John Swinburne has already alluded to, another important issue that will impact on pensioner poverty is the abolition of the council tax. The council tax has been the bane of many pensioners’ lives. Thousands of pensioners end up being caught in the poverty trap. They lose out on council tax rebates and have to pay full whack, perhaps because they took out an occupational pension. They thought that they were doing the right thing, but they have ended up being punished for that. We want to end that situation by abolishing the council tax and bringing in a local income tax that is based on the ability to pay.

Mrs Mulligan: It is estimated that the council tax raises £1.8 billion and that the local income tax that the SNP proposes would raise only about £1.5 billion. How would the SNP address that shortfall? Would it further cut services to the very pensioners that it is trying to protect?

Shona Robison: The minister should read our policy for herself instead of believing the spin that comes out of her department. Our proposal would replace, penny for penny, the money that the council tax raises, but it is based on the ability to pay. That compares with a system that punishes pensioners. Our system would take half a million pensioners out of local taxation and help to end pensioner poverty—it would replace the unacceptable and indefensible council tax system, which the minister is obviously happy to try to defend. I look forward to hearing her defend it in her concluding remarks; her defence of it will be of great interest to Scottish pensioners.

I would like the Parliament to focus on ending pensioner poverty, but in order to do that we need powers over pensions, tax and the benefits system. When we have those powers I look forward to joining John Swinburne and doing something to end pensioner poverty.

I move amendment S2M-1020.2, to insert at end:

“and that this can only be achieved if the Parliament has a full range of powers including control over pensions, tax and the benefits system.”

09:41

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I suspect that the reason why I was asked to open this debate for the Conservative group is that I am its youngest member and therefore the furthest away from retirement, so I could not be accused of having a partisan interest.

I am pleased that John Swinburne has given us the opportunity to debate pensioner poverty this morning. Despite the Executive's fine words and its usual self-congratulatory amendment, its record is not a happy one. Between 1997-98 and 2000-01, the number of pensioners in Scotland who live in households with less than 50 per cent of mean income rose from 170,000 to 180,000. That figure represents 20 per cent of all pensioners in Scotland. We know that free personal care is being underfunded, with gaps in certain areas, and that hospital waiting lists are getting longer in many cases. Health is a major consideration for older people, so those problems impact disproportionately on their quality of life. However, we cannot say that we are going to eradicate poverty, as Mr Swinburne's motion does, without proposing some measures for doing so. Our amendment seeks to do that.

We recognise that many of the issues that relate to pensioner poverty are reserved to Westminster. The Labour chancellor, Gordon Brown, has dramatically increased the use of means testing. According to the House of Commons library, when the pension credit began in the autumn, 59 per cent of pensioners were eligible for means-tested benefits. The Institute for Fiscal Studies has calculated that the proportion of pensioners on means-tested benefits is expected to grow to 73 per cent by 2025 and 82 per cent by 2050. As Mr Swinburne acknowledged in his opening comments, that extension of means testing brings its own problems. Many pensioners are reluctant to claim means-tested benefits as they regard it as demeaning to do so. Therefore, pensioners end up losing out and living in unnecessary poverty.

Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): The member mentioned several statistics to back up his argument. Is he aware that it is estimated that only 52 per cent of pensioners claim pension credit, which means that the remaining 48 per cent, who are entitled to do so, do not claim it?

Murdo Fraser: That is a fair point from Mr Rumbles.

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Unusually.

Murdo Fraser: My colleague ungraciously said "Unusually", but I will not share in that comment.

We must reduce means testing and consider pensions being paid as of right. A higher basic

state pension would be the single most effective weapon in helping to reduce pensioner poverty. That is why our colleagues at Westminster have a policy to re-establish the link between pensions and earnings, which would be of direct benefit to every pensioner in Scotland and the United Kingdom.

Mrs Margaret Ewing (Moray) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Murdo Fraser: I am sorry. I am very short of time this morning.

The Presiding Officer: It is a tight debate.

Murdo Fraser: As Mr Swinburne acknowledged, it is interesting that the Adam Smith Institute, the free-market think tank, yesterday proposed a substantial increase in the state pension, albeit funded by an increase in the pension age, which we do not find quite so acceptable. Clearly, that increase has a cost, but it is generally acknowledged that it is much less desirable to have means-tested benefits than to have a basic state pension available to all.

The great majority of those who retire—some 90 per cent—do so with some sort of private or occupational pension. In the past few years, those sectors have been under constant attack from the Labour Government. A huge part of the problem was Gordon Brown's decision in his first budget to levy a £5 billion per year tax on pensions by abolishing dividend tax credits. The result of that was to make private pensions much less attractive and, accordingly, people are stopping saving for their retirement. When that is added to the increase in means testing, it is little wonder that the savings ratio is at an all-time low. The take-up of stakeholder pensions since their introduction has been poor. We must encourage people to start making provision for their old age again, and we must make it attractive for them to do so. Otherwise, pensioner poverty will continue to be a problem.

Fundamentally, we should not consider pensioner poverty in isolation from questions of the wider economy. It is only by having a strong and growing economy that we can provide wealth for all in our society, including our pensioners. Conservatives believe in a free economy with a light touch in the form of regulation and lower business taxes. That is the way to close the opportunity gap and to make our society wealthier, healthier and happier.

I move amendment S2M-1020.1, to insert at end:

"; acknowledges that the increases in means testing for pensioners introduced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Gordon Brown, adversely affect many pensioners who are reluctant to claim the benefits to which they are entitled; supports the re-introduction of a link between pensions and

earnings as proposed by the Conservative Party at Westminster, and recognises that a growing, dynamic economy through lower tax and regulation is the best way to address the problem of poverty for all, including pensioners."

09:46

John Farquhar Munro (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD): I must declare an interest in the topic at the outset because, like many other people, I am a pensioner. I congratulate John Swinburne on bringing forward this debate on behalf of his party. The fact that the people of central Scotland decided to elect him to the Parliament is an indication of the importance of pensioner issues. Perhaps it is also an indication of the need for the Government to address pensioners' needs much more fully. In other parts of the world, the grey vote is given far greater priority than it is given in Scotland, but I hope and believe that political parties will recognise senior citizens' needs more fully in future. Should they not address pensioners' problems, it will be at their peril.

The figures that Mr Swinburne mentions in his motion are scandalous. It is estimated that more than 2,500 elderly people die each year because of cold-related illnesses. That is reprehensible—after all, we are living in the 21st century, not the 19th century. The motion is right to welcome the free central heating programme and I agree that more must be done to improve and expand the service. In my constituency, I have heard about too many cases in which a poor service has been given by those who are employed by the Eaga Partnership to carry out the work. Many people are kept waiting for a surveyor or for the work to be carried out. Pensioners are often told that a contractor or surveyor will turn up on a certain day, but they do not. That is disrespectful, to say the least, and it is frustrating for those who are waiting. In many cases, it will increase the feeling of helplessness and isolation that is often felt by those who are poor, old and vulnerable. I ask the minister to make representations on that issue to the Eaga Partnership after this morning's debate.

In rural parts of Scotland such as the Highlands, much of the problem with the delivery of the central heating programme stems from the lack of—

The Presiding Officer: Mr Munro, I think that you are beginning to stray into this morning's second debate.

John Farquhar Munro: The problem stems from the lack of skilled technicians to do the work. Like everywhere else in Scotland, there is a shortage of trained plumbers, electricians and carpenters. That problem cannot be addressed quickly or easily, and the Executive must give it

further thought. It is a shame that such a positive programme has been marred by problems that could be solved. However, I give credit where credit is due, and the reports that have come back from those who have benefited from the central heating programme are positive.

I am sure that many speakers will mention another problem that pensioners face, which is how to pay their council tax, because many old people are on a fixed income and council tax increases affect them disproportionately. The Liberal Democrats, the socialists and now the SNP all support changing from the council tax to an income-based tax—a local income tax, which I, too, support. That is a fair tax, because it is based on the ability to pay. It will benefit not only pensioners, but all those who are on low incomes. I am confident that the independent review of local government finance will find that local income tax is the best option. Not only is it based on the ability to pay, but it maintains local accountability.

It is galling in this day and age, and in a new Scotland, that many pensioners cannot afford to pay vast tax bills when their pensions rise only by 2.9 per cent, while people who can afford to buy a second home receive an immediate 50 per cent discount on their council tax. That is not acceptable or fair.

I am sure that everybody realises that, as politicians, we will be judged on the level of provision that we secure for our senior citizens. We must all ensure that they can enjoy their years of retirement in comfort and dignity.

The Presiding Officer: Time for the open debate is very tight. We have time only for a short speech from Mark Ballard.

09:51

Mark Ballard (Lothians) (Green): Like others, I congratulate John Swinburne on initiating the debate. Nobody should doubt the severity of pensioner poverty in Scotland. We should recognise that we need radical solutions to tackle the deep-seated and endemic problems. Such radical solutions to deal with our pension and tax systems can be achieved only when the Scottish Parliament has the power to implement them.

How will we lift pensioners out of poverty? What radical solutions do we need? One of the main problems is the non-integration of our tax system and our benefits system. I agree with Mike Rumbles and Murdo Fraser that having a means-tested benefits system for pensioners is a major problem. On top of that means-tested system are the complexities of the minimum income guarantee and other measures. It is no wonder that a huge number of pensioners do not take the benefits to which they are entitled, as Mike Rumbles said.

The radical solution that a Scottish Parliament with full powers should adopt is integration of the tax and benefits systems through the introduction of a citizens income that is available to all citizens who are over 18. A citizens income would give pensioners and others in society the flexibility to continue to work, to retire or to use the savings that they have accrued over a lifetime of work without the fear that means testing would reduce or eliminate their savings. A citizens income that was available to all citizens would allow pensioners who wish to retire early to do so. Why do we need an arbitrary retirement age of 60 or 65? Some people want to retire earlier and some, like John Farquhar Munro and John Swinburne, wish to continue to make a contribution to society by working hard.

Such a measure should be supported. A citizens income would guarantee that we lifted pensioners out of poverty while enabling them to enjoy their savings and allowing those who wish to continue to work to do so. We should be mindful of the contribution that all in society can make and we should be grateful for the work that pensioners have done and are doing. We should ensure that they do not suffer poverty as they enjoy their old age. I am grateful for the opportunity to speak.

The Presiding Officer: That brings us to winding-up speeches.

09:54

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I will speak about the latest stealth tax that has been imposed on pensioners in the Highlands. They are being forced to pay for chiropody care that they received for free in the past. Conservatives believe that if people pay their taxes and wish to pay for private treatment, that is their choice. However, we do not believe that people should be forced to go private when no regard is had to ability to pay.

In the past two years, NHS Highland has reviewed chiropody care. That has resulted in cuts in chiropody care for people who are in care homes; for people who have Alzheimer's disease and cannot state their needs or communicate their pain; for elderly people who have diabetes; for people who are registered blind; and for people who have arthritis and cannot even hold scissors, who are told that they must take care of their own foot care. Many people have been removed from the treatment list and the number of appointments for those who receive chiropody care has been halved at best.

I commend Alex Bochel of Nairn, who was 82 this week. Many elderly people feel very vulnerable and do not wish to speak out, because they are frightened that they might be picked on.

They are frightened of going back to the NHS as they feel that they might be victimised.

Another war veteran—a Normandy veteran—came along to my surgery in Nairn this week. Like Alex Bochel, he has worked all his life. He fought in the war and paid his taxes and national insurance. He desperately needs chiropody care to be mobile and independent; to prevent him from falling; to save the health service from providing him with community care; and to reduce the need for him to receive NHS acute care in hospital. Nairn is a very social place and offers a good life for those who play bridge and golf. That gentleman told me that in one week, he had spoken to about 50 people who have had their chiropody care cut or have been removed from the list altogether. He said that they are being forced to go private, irrespective of their ability to pay.

Mark Ballard talked about radical solutions. NHS Highland came up with a radical solution for that gentleman. In the vein of Marie Antoinette, it was suggested that he and his friends should have a party. He was told, "Never mind bringing your own bottle. Why don't you all bring your own toenail-clippers?" That shows the arrogance and complacency in NHS Highland's treatment of elderly people. I welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate and to describe the respect that the Executive has for our war veterans and many others. It asks people who have Alzheimer's disease or diabetes, who are registered blind or who have arthritis to have a toenail-clipping party. That must be the height of arrogance, complacency and heartlessness. The fact that NHS boards are being forced down that road reflects much of the Lib-Lab Executive's direction.

I thought that I had two minutes for my speech, but I was given four minutes, so I will finish early.

09:58

Mrs Margaret Ewing (Moray) (SNP): Like many others, I congratulate John Swinburne on initiating not only this debate, but the subsequent debate, because they concern important issues. I share deeply the concerns that he described in his speech. I have been involved in such issues for about three decades, having been the Scottish National Party's social security and pensions spokesperson at Westminster. I assure members that understanding social security and pensions legislation is not an easy task.

Many of the forms that are presented to our population are complex and people find them very difficult. We must remember that demographic changes in our society mean that not every pensioner has close at hand a loyal member of the family to assist them with those complexities. As social security is a reserved matter, one issue that

Westminster should deal with is simplification of the forms that are presented to our elderly population.

It is amazing how much money the Treasury saves from the lack of take-up of the benefits that are available to our pensioner population. People do not fill in the forms because they are so complex. Another factor is the attitude of a generation that believes strongly in the concept of independence.

I remember my brother and I trying to persuade my mother, when she had been widowed, that she should apply for housing benefit from the council. However, she said that she did not want charity. The only way in which we could persuade her to apply for housing benefit was to take along our pay slips and say, "See these deductions, mum? That is our contribution to looking after people such as you. This is not charity—people like us are working and are willing to support you."

As members of the Scottish Parliament, we can only advise and provide information to pensioners. I hope that in her response to the debate the minister will say what representations she is making to the Executive's pal Gordon Brown, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, on the streamlining of the social security system.

It is amazing that Murdo Fraser, of all people, should have spoken about the breaking of the link between pensions and earnings. Somewhere in the grey recesses of his mind must be the knowledge that the link was broken by a Conservative Government. He should not argue the case in the way that he did when the problem is the Conservatives' fault.

I look forward to hearing what the Liberal Democrats will say about fuel poverty, as we have heard part of it already. However, as we know, last year John Farquhar Munro received the award for being the free spirit of the year. He said that the SNP now supports the introduction of a local income tax. I have been a member of the party since 1966 and believe without hesitation that the introduction of a local income tax has been our policy since that time. It has taken some of the other parties a wee bit longer to wake up to it. We have always believed that taxation should be based on the ability to pay. Fergus Ewing and I live in Lossiemouth, where we are surrounded by a small community. Nearly all our neighbours are widows or widowers, but we are all in the same council tax band. Our household has two salaries coming in, but other people do not have that luxury. For me, ability to pay is critical.

Pensioners are a great asset to Scotland and to our communities. As grandparents and great-grandparents, they help with our children. They deserve our respect and to be involved in our

society. A bus pass does not mean redundancy from life and a pension is not a passport to oblivion.

10:02

Mrs Mulligan: I welcome the opportunity to speak this morning on this issue and I am glad that John Swinburne chose it for debate.

The Executive is delivering changes that are making a real difference to our older people; they are reducing poverty among older people and improving their quality of life. Since 1997, 80,000 pensioners—almost a third of pensioner households—have been taken out of relative poverty. More than 170,000 pensioners—more than two thirds of pensioner households—have been lifted out of absolute poverty. Those are real improvements that are making a real difference to the lives of the poorest pensioners. On average, Scottish pensioner households are £1,400 a year better off as a result of measures that have been introduced since 1997.

How have we made that progress? A number of initiatives have been introduced and actions taken. There have been above-inflation increases to the basic state pension, and a new pension credit has been introduced that ensures a minimum income for all pensioners and rewards those who have saved. More than 200,000 pensioner households in Scotland have claimed the credit so far and uptake continues to increase. I say to Mike Rumbles that the introduction of the credit has been deliberately phased. However, no one will lose out on their entitlement, even if they are in the later stages of phasing. I hope that that reassures him that pensioners will not lose out.

The winter fuel payment is a £200 payment that is made to all people of pension age. In the winter of 2004, the UK Parliament increased the payment by £100 for the over-80s. Free TV licences have been introduced for the over-75s and fuel tax has been cut from 8 per cent to 5 per cent. That tax was introduced by the Tories, who tried—fortunately unsuccessfully—to increase it to 17.5 per cent. What effect would that have had on our pensioners?

The Executive will continue to ensure that all pensioners claim their full entitlement to benefits. Because we listen to them, we know that poverty is not just about income.

John Swinburne: Will the minister acknowledge that this year the Executive will claw back £259 million in Scotland because of means testing? In the United Kingdom, the figure is a massive £2.56 billion. Does she acknowledge that as long as there is means testing, there is no way the Executive can deliver what it wishes to deliver? The forms are too convoluted and complicated.

Mrs Mulligan: I will come on to form filling and how we can assist with that. Through means testing, we are able to tackle the problems of the poorest, the most vulnerable and the neediest first and because we live in the real world and have limited budgets, it is important that we address first the needs of those who are most in need.

We listen, and the partnership agreement tries to respond to issues that we have heard about. The agreement commits us to reducing fuel poverty further and to extending our central heating programme and the warm deal, with initial focus being on the over-80s. We will introduce free local off-peak bus travel for all pensioners, which will benefit more than 1 million disabled and elderly people throughout Scotland.

We have already introduced free personal care and nursing care. By the end of 2006, we will have committed £450 million to the scheme since it began. However, we still hear criticisms from the likes of Murdo Fraser. I say to Mr Fraser that, had we been in the economic situation in which the Conservatives left us in 1997, we would not have been able to introduce the scheme.

Mary Scanlon: Will the minister give way?

Mrs Mulligan: No—I do not have time.

We will continue to invest £30 million a year for three years to tackle the problem of delayed discharge and we will provide 1,000 community and convalescent care places for people leaving hospital. I say without hesitation that we are reducing pensioner poverty, providing public services for pensioners and improving the lives of older people, but we know that we need to consider complex solutions.

Yesterday we had an excellent debate about issues relating to antisocial behaviour; we know that older people can be affected disproportionately by the sense of fear and alarm that antisocial behaviour causes. That is why we are building respect in our communities. We want to ensure that people of all ages have a decent quality of life. Through the supporting people programme and the quality of life initiative, local authorities are providing about £290 million of extra services to older people in their homes, which enables them to remain independent in their communities. The services include community care-and-repair schemes, housing adaptations, sheltered housing wardens and installation of security devices.

I return to the point that John Swinburne made. I am aware that people sometimes have difficulty claiming benefits. It has been brought to our attention that provision of assistance and advice would be valuable in ensuring that people are able to claim what they are entitled to. Today I am delighted to announce that we are providing

£125,000 to Age Concern Scotland, with the aim of giving better information and advice to older people. Age Concern Scotland will develop a consortium-led approach, working with a range of organisations—including older people's organisations—to get for older people the answers that they need as quickly and easily as possible.

Mrs Ewing: The minister has mentioned £125,000 that will be given to Age Concern Scotland, which all members welcome. Has an assessment been made of how many people the money will affect?

Mrs Mulligan: I do not have those figures at the moment, but we have made a start on developing an advice and assistance service that will respond to the needs of the people to whom Mrs Ewing referred in her speech. It is important that we get it across to people that benefits exist as their entitlement, that benefits do not represent charity and that people should claim what is available.

Pensioners do not make up a homogeneous group and their needs are diverse. The Executive is tackling pensioner poverty and we are improving the lives of older people who need it most. Through UK Government policies, we are delivering real reductions in poverty. We are increasing incomes and investing in and reforming public services that pensioners in Scotland need through a range of targeted and universal services. We have always recognised that it might take time to bring about change, but we will bring change. We acknowledge that we still have much to do, but it is our ambition that pensioners will live in a Scotland in which everyone matters.

10:11

Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind): I will set the context for the debate—we are the Scottish Parliament in lobbying mode. We cannot do anything about getting fair pensions because we do not have that power, but I suspect that we will hear less about our lack of power in that respect than we heard yesterday about our shameful lack of power as regards the three men who are dying in Glasgow.

In exercising Parliament's power as a lobbyist, we have to persuade Gordon Brown that he is taking the wrong tack. I say that regretfully because I accept much of what the minister said about the improvements to the lives of perhaps 50 per cent of UK pensioners since the Government changed. However, that is not enough—what about the other 50 per cent? Let us not forget the figures that John Swinburne produced—50 per cent of pensioners' income is below the level that we consider to be reasonable and acceptable in this day and age, and 25 per cent live in real poverty.

The minister cannot defend the current system: she can defend what the devolved Scottish Executive has tried to do to ameliorate the shortcomings of the present system, but it is not enough. Until the Scottish Parliament exercises sovereignty over a combined tax and monetary policy, we will not get things right. We must harmonise our tax system with our benefits and if we do not, we will only ever be putting a sticking plaster over the wounds that John Swinburne's speech exposed.

We should accept that pension levels are not an argument in favour of fiscal and monetary union with England. As well as lobbying for the pensioners who are suffering today—in particular the 25 per cent of them who concern Mary Mulligan as much as they concern me—we should also be looking wider, longer and broader. We should look to see how we can harmonise our tax system with our benefits system.

I commend to the minister the Pensions Policy Institute report that was published only yesterday. It draws on experience from New Zealand, where there is no attempt to target, or to differentiate between, pensioners. Every pensioner in New Zealand, depending simply on their age, is paid the set, basic state pension. It is obvious that some people make private arrangements and will therefore have an income that might comprise the state pension plus their private pension, on which they will be taxed. Therefore, rich pensioners pay more and poor pensioners who either do not have private savings or who have much smaller private savings pay less in tax. That seems to be a much more equitable system. I say with all due respect that if the Tories were able to forget the idea of trying to induce people to save, they could adopt the New Zealand policy, too. It would be much simpler to administer and would not involve the 39 pages of form filling that is currently required if people want to claim their entitlements.

What can we do to improve the quality of Scottish pensioners' lives? We know that we cannot do much about their basic pension at the moment. We have tried and I commend the Executive for that, but we could do more. To do more, we must ensure that local authorities are given more money than they have at present to operate, for example, free exercise schemes. Now that I have won my campaign to get physical education teachers into schools, I warn the minister that I am going for the golden oldies. I want proper exercise facilities and regimes in place at local level—depending on local facilities—and I want them to be funded and free for pensioners.

Television is an absolute requirement for providing information and advice in today's world. When one gets to be over 75—a lot older than I

am, anyway—one can have a free television licence. For goodness' sake, why cannot people get a free television licence when they stop working? I do not see why there should not be free licences for those who are not working because that aspect should also be brought to bear on the judgment.

The Government's policy of targeting the poorest people is not working. If it were, we would not be having the debate today. The Executive has to be much more universal in its approach to benefits and it must use the time-honoured system of clawing back through the taxation system from people who can afford to pay their way. All sorts of notional payments can be levied from local and national services, but I will not go into that now. I would like to bang the drum for local authorities to be given much more freedom to ensure that older people make full use of existing services. I assure the minister that, if she went right now to the Edinburgh royal Commonwealth pool—where I should be instead of here—she would meet many ladies of my age, all of whom exercise two or three times a week in the pool. The pool is open to swimmers anyway, so it would not lose out on the paltry sum that we pay because we are not paying an economically viable sum anyway. I want free exercise to be available.

Mrs Mulligan: If Margo MacDonald went to my constituency in West Lothian, she would be able to go swimming for free. Does she accept that local authorities should be given the right to make decisions on such issues?

Margo MacDonald: I agree totally. Local authorities should have that freedom, but they also need the money. Although you could not get me out of Edinburgh with a knife and fork, Presiding Officer, I pay tribute to West Lothian and what it has tried to do. However, because of the financial structures of leisure services here, the City of Edinburgh Council cannot do the same at present, although I want it to be able to do so.

We also have to consider the part that health boards play in enhancing or diminishing the quality of life for older people. Mary Scanlon's story about chiropody in the Highlands was absolutely scandalous. I realise that we in the Scottish Parliament do not give order to such matters according to budget alone, but elderly people should not pay for chiropody—it is part and parcel of keeping them up and going and ensuring that they contribute to the economy so that they are not a drain on health services. I ask the minister to take seriously what Mary Scanlon said.

In conclusion, I ask the minister to use her influence—I realise that she does not have the power—to open a debate with the chancellor and the Government at Westminster on a flat-rate pension that would allow every old person to retire in dignity and comfort.

Winter Cold-related Deaths

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): We move to the second short debate of the morning, which is a debate on motion S2M-1021, in the name of John Swinburne, on winter cold-related deaths and two amendments to the motion. I invite those members who wish to contribute to the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons.

10:19

John Swinburne (Central Scotland) (SSCUP): I thank you again this morning, Presiding Officer. Many serious issues badly affect the people I represent, but I am most conscious of the growing number of senior citizens and vulnerable members of our society who die each year from cold-related illnesses. Every winter, thousands of early deaths and extra hospital admissions occur because older people cannot afford to heat their homes adequately.

During the winter of 2002-03, the number of deaths that were caused by cold-related illnesses rose by 700 to 2,510 and in the years from 1997 to 2002 Scotland registered 16,600 excess deaths of people over 65 in the winter months of December to March. The death toll is comparable to that in 10 major air disasters, yet there has been no comparable response from the Government. Is not it disgraceful that pensioners are more likely to die of cold in Scotland than they are in Finland, Canada, Norway and even Siberia, where temperatures can plunge to -32°C?

The Deputy Minister for Communities (Mrs Mary Mulligan): I recognise that Mr Swinburne is trying to imply that pensioners in Scotland are more likely to die because of the cold, but he must accept that there are more complex reasons for the figures. If we consider the mortality figures, we see that the figures in Scotland are very similar to those of Italy, Spain and Portugal, which are not particularly cold.

John Swinburne: I believe that those figures are due to excessive wine drinking in those hot countries, but I assure the minister that the cold kills people in Scotland.

Recent research by Energy Action Scotland and the University of Strathclyde showed that excess winter deaths correlate to multiple deprivation. The researchers concluded that the majority of such deaths are premature and could be prevented if the elderly could be kept warm in their houses in the winter months. It would therefore be churlish not to acknowledge the excellent pledge that the Scottish Executive made in 2001, when it allocated £350 million to install central heating systems in an identified 141,000 houses in Scotland—I am sorry to present members with so

many statistics, but facts are chieftains that winna ding, as Rabbie said.

The central heating programme is an excellent scheme on paper, and would be excellent in reality if it were fully implemented. However, since the launch of the initiative, it has been difficult to determine the numbers, costs and completion dates of installations. In a recent reply to a written question that I asked, the Deputy Minister for Communities indicated that only 39,520 households had had central heating systems installed.

From what I can glean, some £108 million has been spent to date on the programme. Completion dates for installation are reminiscent of those for the Holyrood building project, as dates range from 2004 to perhaps as far ahead as 2007. That means that, by 2004, heating systems will have been installed in 28 per cent of the houses that were originally identified, at a cost that will represent 38 per cent of the original budget. I am aware that some applicants for central heating systems do not qualify under the programme, but I cannot believe that 72 per cent of the houses that were originally identified are ineligible. In December, Communities Scotland stated that the Scottish Executive had lowered its targets. I cannot accept the Executive's stance, given that there was an excessive number of winter deaths last year and that that trend is likely to continue.

I receive letters constantly from senior citizens throughout Scotland whose applications for central heating have been turned down on the ground that the authorities believe that their homes are already adequately heated. The Executive might think that one open fire—or gas or electric fire—and a 42-year-old electric storage heater represent an adequate heating system, but I do not and nor do the pensioners who are forced to live in the one room in their home that has any source of heat.

Energy Action Scotland and Age Concern Scotland have stated that the central heating programme should be extended to target frail elderly people in harder-to-reach households. I think that the Executive has acknowledged that and is doing something about it and I am delighted to hear that. Energy Action Scotland and Age Concern Scotland have also called for the extension of the grants programme for people in the private sector who have partial central heating. I support those calls for an immediate extension to the programme. It is imperative that the Executive tell members clearly and precisely the number of households in which free central heating systems will be installed, above the 39,520 that have already been identified. It is important that the central heating initiative continue and be expanded in order to prevent unnecessary deaths.

Winter fuel payments must be better promoted and the Executive's fuel poverty forum should intensify its efforts to ensure that the main energy companies use the priority service register to target people who are fuel poor. Fuel poverty can be eradicated by more efficient insulation and heating systems.

Energy costs are another factor. Despite the fact that Scotland is 2°C colder than England, our death rate from hypothermia is three times that of England. The report into comparative energy costs by the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets showed that household costs are approximately £22 per year higher in Scotland. There were 458 disconnections in the first half of 2003, compared with 218 in the whole of 2002. For many people, disconnecting their energy supply is like shutting down their life-support system. I am seriously concerned that the problem will be exacerbated as energy prices continue to rise, and that there will be more disconnections as pensioners increasingly struggle to pay their fuel bills. Pre-payment meters undo all the good of Scottish Power's moratorium on disconnecting power to pensioners between October and March, because if a pensioner cannot afford a pre-payment electricity card, their supply is automatically cut off. That needs urgent attention.

I ask members to examine their consciences and to help my party to promote an extension of the central heating programme, which is an exceptionally good and worthwhile initiative.

I move,

That the Parliament notes with extreme concern recent figures that show that there were 2,510 deaths from cold-related illnesses during the winter of 2002-03, the majority of those being elderly people, an increase of nearly 700; condemns such statistics as reprehensible in Scotland in the 21st century, and, while welcoming the Scottish Executive's free central heating programme, recognises that the delivery of such programmes must be improved and extended to reach all senior citizens in need as soon as possible.

10:26

The Deputy Minister for Communities (Mrs Mary Mulligan): I move amendment S2M-1021.2, to leave out from "with extreme concern" to end and insert:

"the recent figures on winter cold-related deaths; recognises the decrease by half in the number of fuel-poor households in Scotland; welcomes the Scottish Executive's extension of the central heating programme to upgrade or replace partial or inefficient central heating systems for the over-80s in the private sector, and reaffirms the commitment to eradicate fuel poverty as far as reasonably practicable by 2016 thereby combating the threat of winter cold-related deaths."

10:26

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

I thank John Swinburne for bringing this important debate to the Parliament. The subject is exceptionally close to my heart; I think that I have spoken in every debate on fuel poverty in the Parliament since 1999. On behalf of the Scottish National Party, I also thank Margaret Ewing for the work that she has done over three decades, both in this Parliament and at Westminster, to ensure that fuel poverty is on the political agenda.

Excess winter deaths are calculated by comparing overall mortality statistics in the period from December to March with average death rates in the previous and subsequent four-month periods. The figures for excess winter deaths in Scotland are a disgrace to a civilised country. Every winter, what can best be described as a cull of elderly people takes place. It is important to remember that we are not talking about statistics; we are talking about people. Of course, the death certificates do not say, "Died of hypothermia" or "Died of cold", but that is why those people have died. Stirling Howieson, of the University of Strathclyde, says:

"These additional winter deaths are mainly in the elderly population and about 90 per cent are registered under heart, stroke and respiratory diseases, all of which are known to be exacerbated by cold living conditions. These deaths are essentially preventable if the elderly live in warm, dry homes."

That is the challenge for all of us. When we talk about excess winter deaths, it is important to remember that warm, dry homes will prevent those deaths.

As John Swinburne rightly said, between 1997 and 2002, Scotland registered 16,600 excess winter deaths among the over-65s in the period from December to March. However, we do not need research to tell us that; we just need to read the columns upon columns of death notices in our local newspapers in winter.

Why do people die of cold in winter in fuel-rich Scotland? We do not have particularly harsh winters; Sweden, Germany, Finland and even Siberia have harsher winters but fewer excess winter deaths than Scotland. All those countries, however, have higher standards of housing and a better quality of life.

I am grateful to Energy Action Scotland for its continuing work on fuel poverty. Fuel poverty is age related. Some 31 per cent of people over 75 are officially fuel poor, compared with only 5 per cent of people who are aged between 25 and 39. That is why today's debate is so important. The Government claims—and the minister claimed earlier—that the causes of excess winter deaths are complex and uncertain. However, there is

consensus that poor heating and insulation and low income are the major factors.

The amount of money that it takes to heat a house varies considerably in different parts of the United Kingdom. It costs 41 per cent more to heat a house in Aberdeen, and 28 per cent more in Edinburgh, than it does in Bristol, yet the pension is the same wherever people live in the United Kingdom. I acknowledge that the Executive has made strides forward with the central heating programme, but that is only one part of the equation in tackling fuel poverty.

In a recent debate, the Executive claimed that the number of people in fuel poverty had decreased; that claim is replicated in the Executive's amendment today. During that debate in December, I pointed out that the central heating programme was only one aspect and that we had to take into account household income and fuel prices. Within a week, fuel prices in Scotland went up: Scottish Gas put up gas prices by 5.9 per cent. I asked the Executive in a written question what impact that 5.9 per cent increase would have on the number of people in fuel poverty. The answer began:

"The information requested could only be obtained at a disproportionate cost."—[*Official Report, Written Answers*, 13 January 2004; S2W-4886.]

I acknowledge that the Executive has made strides forward, but let us not pretend that the central heating programme is a panacea. We can eradicate fuel poverty but we have to be able to support income and pension levels. Excess winter deaths are caused by poverty. We need to tackle poverty, and this Parliament needs the power to do so.

I move amendment S2M-1021.1, to insert at end:

"and that fuel poverty in Scotland will not be eradicated until the Parliament has the full range of powers, including control over the pension and benefit system."

10:31

Mr David Davidson (North East Scotland) (Con): I congratulate John Swinburne on bringing these debates to the chamber this morning. Whether we like it or not, our population is aging; we must show respect to those who, without necessarily seeing much gain for themselves, have made life for us as easy as it has been.

One thing that jumps out from the statistics is that the incidence of winter deaths is rising faster than the increase in the age of the population. We have to consider the factors that have caused that. They fall into four main categories—heating, nutrition, health and wealth. Dealing with a combination of all four of those factors may help to solve the problem.

The Eaga Partnership's website states clearly that the central heating programme contains no provisions for the upgrading of existing inefficient systems. In our surgeries, we have all heard people saying, "The radiators are there but the boiler's inefficient. I'm told it's only got 20 per cent efficiency but I can't get a new one." In her amendment, the minister talks about upgrading systems "for the over-80s". In general, would it not be simpler to use heating systems that are already in place, because it would cost less to upgrade existing systems that are not working or are inefficient? Upgrading such systems might encourage people to use them.

When my mother was quite elderly and getting close to her death, we put her into a new house and I put in central heating for her. She wanted to turn it all off because of an instinctive desire not to waste money or heat. I had to get an engineer to put pins in all the thermostats so that there was a minimum temperature in the different rooms. Bless her—she never caught on to that. We knew then that she would at least get heat.

The biggest contributor to affordable fuel was the privatisation by the Conservative Government of the utilities. Reports by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and by UK Energy point out that privatisation reduced domestic energy costs in real terms by 18 to 20 per cent for electricity and about 16 per cent for gas. Power became more affordable. The next stage will be to get people to be more fuel efficient in their homes.

The Labour-Liberal Government in Scotland had a target in 1999 to eliminate fuel poverty by 2007. The Government has now been more realistic and has moved that target to 2016. I am not castigating the minister for that change, which simply reflects reality. However, we now have to say that that is the final cut-off date. We must have no more extensions, because we can all work towards the 2016 target.

The Conservatives had a home energy efficiency scheme that has rolled on into the warm deal. I congratulate the Labour Party on taking up where we left off in 1997. That has to be welcomed.

I turn now to health issues. Bedblocking is a huge problem and care homes are underfunded, so some people have nowhere to go and have to stay in their own homes. The NHS Quality Improvement Scotland report in February 2004 says that many people in hospital should not be there and that less than a quarter of trusts are achieving admission within two hours of someone being seen at an accident and emergency department. We have to consider such points.

We need to offer regular, pre-winter health checks to elderly people, to ensure that their

health is properly assessed before winter starts. People at risk need to have regular checks, whether by means of phone calls or by means of people knocking on their doors. We must encourage good neighbourhood schemes to support people and keep a watchful eye on them. Following on from what Margo MacDonald said this morning, I believe that community facilities and luncheon clubs—and the transport that goes with them—help to keep people alert and awake.

We have not mentioned carers at all this morning. I hope that the minister will say how we can help them to look after the elderly.

10:35

Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD): This is one issue on which the Executive at least has a pass mark. As always, the report could say, "Could do better," but, in the previous session of Parliament and in this one, the Executive has genuinely tried to address the problem of cold affecting old people.

The coldest that I have ever been was when I was a wee boy, in the very severe winter of about 1940. At school, we were sent for a brisk walk in the first period every day so that we got mildly warm, the school had time to warm up a wee bit and, in particular, the ink in the old-fashioned inkwells had time to unfreeze. I have not been so cold since, but cold is a serious problem for many elderly people and we have to address it.

Three issues arise. First, there is a good insulation programme for houses to prevent loss of heat, but more effort could be put into it. In Scotland, we have a great many well-built old houses but, unfortunately, they were built in the days before central heating and many of them still do not have proper heating systems or insulation. Our ancestors put up with draughts much more than we are able to.

Secondly, after the second world war, we built many houses that, to be quite honest, are rubbish. We are still dealing with the resultant problems. In respect of insulation, our houses are much worse built than are Scandinavian houses, for example. More effort has to go into our work on insulation and central heating. As others have said, we have to get systems delivered locally. Bureaucracy must not get in the way. We have to improve existing central heating systems as well as putting in entirely new ones. The minister and her predecessors can take credit for doing quite a lot, but more could still be done.

The third issue is income and the cost of fuel. Some issues are not within the control of this Parliament but we could still address them better. There would be no point in giving every household in Scotland a motor car when half those

households could not afford the petrol to run it. We have to consider people's income as well as providing a central heating system or other method of heating.

In the earlier debate this morning, pensioners' income, or lack of it, was discussed. Most such matters are reserved to Westminster. However, we could consider how we can help those who have received the benefit of central heating. We could perhaps subsidise their fuel payments. Intelligent government must be able to find some way round things, to crack the system and thus ensure that more old people benefit from the things that we have done for them or that they have done for themselves. People should be able to afford decent heating, because that is an integral part of life. The older we get, the more we need it. I commend the Executive for what it has done so far, but there are issues on which we can improve.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh): I am afraid that there is no time to call anyone in the open debate, so I call the minister to respond.

10:39

Mrs Mulligan: Excess winter deaths are a serious issue and I welcome the opportunity to discuss the matter again following our debate in November. The issue is not simply about living in a cold climate or in a poor house. We are doing our utmost to tackle the causes of cold-related and increasing death rates. Pensioners' incomes are being increased and we are improving people's homes. We know that we are having some success. Fuel poverty figures have plummeted since 1996—they are down by more than a half—and we are meeting all our warm deal insulation programme and central heating programme targets.

Tricia Marwick: Will the minister not acknowledge, even at this stage, that fuel poverty relates to three things: house conditions, household income and fuel prices? Fuel prices were held steady for a long time and that helped in no small way to bring down fuel poverty levels. A 5.9 per cent increase in fuel bills inevitably means that the number of people in fuel poverty will increase. The central heating programme has had an impact, but not the kind of impact that the minister is trying to suggest that it has had.

Mrs Mulligan: The programme has indeed had an impact. I will come to the issues that Tricia Marwick raises, but, as she has intervened, I should refer to what she said earlier about a lack of information on fuel price rises. We did not have the figures when she wrote, but in our response in the fuel poverty debate later in the session we will try to bring together figures that will show the impact of fuel price increases.

We are not complacent about the impact that the central heating programme has had. We know that we must remain vigilant and that, although some of the easy-to-treat homes have been treated, we will be challenged by the expensive-to-treat homes. We know that some people need a higher income or cheaper fuel. We encourage people to find out whether they are getting all the benefits and tax credits to which they are entitled and we encourage them to switch fuels or suppliers if they can get a cheaper deal.

The central heating and warm deal programmes are making significant inroads to eradicate fuel poverty. Cold and damp housing can have serious health implications. The benefits of those programmes ensure that the most vulnerable households have warmer homes and lower fuel bills.

The central heating programme started in 2001. Since then, we have installed 31,730 central heating systems. Homes now benefit from central heating where none previously existed. Our warm deal programme also provides the most vulnerable with a package of measures to help to insulate their homes. In the current year, we expect approximately 30,000 homes to benefit from those insulation measures. So far, we have insulated more than 180,000 homes.

In the fuel poverty debate in November, the Minister for Communities said that she was concerned about the high number of disconnections. Since then, she has raised that issue with the energy companies. Last week, I was pleased to see that the disconnection figures for the last quarter of 2003 were significantly down on the figures for the previous quarters. I agree with John Swinburne that we must encourage pensioners to register on the priority services register for added protection.

The cumulative effect of our measures and actions is that a substantial number of people now benefit from warm and comfortable homes. A sign of a civilised society is that it looks after its elderly citizens and our achievements illustrate our commitment to, and the importance that we place on, the health and welfare of our senior citizens.

10:43

John Swinburne: Much of what has been said has been illuminating. I do not in any way disparage the Executive's excellent central heating scheme, which is absolutely marvellous. We know many recipients of the scheme who are enjoying its benefits. However, the scheme does not quite go far enough or fast enough. Tricia Marwick mentioned rises in fuel prices. I know people who have had central heating systems installed in their homes but who cannot afford to turn them on. That

is wrong. There is bound to be some way in which we can enhance their living standards by considering that problem.

David Davidson's contribution to the debate was excellent. He mentioned the over-80s. The chancellor is looking after them, you know. Only last week, I received a form that told me about my pension. A little footnote said that, when I reach 80, my pension will automatically be increased by 25p. The increase does not need to be applied for and there is no means testing. I do not know what I will do with that 25p. If I give it to any of my grandchildren as pocket money, they will laugh at me. Perhaps I will save it up and buy a stamp or something like that with it, once the money accumulates.

Donald Gorrie took me back down memory lane. I, too, have been in school when the inkwells have frozen up. We would be taken outside for a class ramble until the inkwells thawed out and a fire heated up the room.

Mary Mulligan made a genuine defence of the excellent central heating programme. The fact that the figures are rising is interesting. I know that she will take on board my point that we are not doing enough fast enough. Unfortunately, everything is not in the Executive's control. Some councils are doing excellent work, but other councils are dragging their feet. I mentioned earlier a gentleman who wrote to me saying that he had three electric storage heaters that were manufactured in 1965. If he put them on, he would go bankrupt trying to keep them going—the meter would start going round.

Mrs Mulligan: Does the member accept that all local authorities will have completed the installation of central heating systems this year? If anybody in their stock does not have a system, that will be because they are not aware of the programme. We need to advertise the service to ensure that people come forward. The issue is not that people are being ignored, but that people do not know about the systems.

John Swinburne: I say to the minister that the figures do not add up. We can locate only 39,520 homes that have had central heating installed in them, but 141,000 homes were originally identified as requiring central heating installation. The figures do not equate. There is a huge disparity.

Mrs Mulligan: That is because the figure that we used initially was from the 1996 house condition survey. During the period from 1996 to 2001, when the programme started, a large number of local authorities installed central heating. That is why the figure came down.

John Swinburne: That is one explanation that we can look into further. However, it does not solve the problem that 141,000 houses required

upgrading and only around 40,000 have been upgraded. There is something amiss.

The debate has been interesting. It is good that, for once, my generation is in the forefront. We are a quarter of the electorate. If a quarter of the electorate are ignored, they can ignore people when it comes to putting a big cross on the ballot paper.

Council Tax

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh):

The next item of business is a debate on motion S2M-984, in the name of Tommy Sheridan, on the council tax, and one amendment to the motion.

10:48

Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP): It is right and fitting to debate such important issues in the chamber this morning. We have just debated pensioner poverty and the scandal of winter cold-related deaths. We will now debate the council tax and the just case of Scotland's nursery nurses, about which my colleagues Frances Curran and Carolyn Leckie will say more. I simply say that it is a fact of life that the majority of poor pensioners are women. That is because women have been low paid for longer in their lives. Scotland's nursery nurse work force predominantly consists of women. They are fighting the scandal of low pay and deserve 100 per cent support from the people of Scotland.

Another major factor that contributes to pensioner poverty is the unfair Tory council tax, which, in the past 10 years, has increased by 80 per cent. The council tax was introduced as a knee-jerk measure by the last Tory Government to try to save its skin after the poll tax rebellion. Ten years on, we have a tax that pampers the well paid and the wealthy, but punishes the pensioner household and the ordinary worker. The company director whose income is 100 times that of one of his employees will only pay a maximum of three times more in council tax. Millions of households throughout Scotland—particularly pensioner households, but also working households—can now hardly afford to pay the rising council tax bills. They are having to sacrifice other items, such as holidays, clothes and decorating their homes; because of the council tax, families are having to sacrifice things that many of us take for granted.

Today's debate is not about alternatives to the council tax. In that respect, I applaud the Scottish National Party for not lodging an amendment to the motion. We in the Scottish Socialist Party have our proposal, the Lib Dems have their proposal, the SNP has its proposal and the Greens have their proposal. There is no doubt that there is time and a need to debate the alternatives. We believe in an income-based alternative. Whether our scheme is better than those of the Lib Dems or the SNP, time will tell, but today's debate is about whether members agree that the council tax should be scrapped. We are asking members today to agree that the council tax should be replaced with an income-based alternative, not that it should be replaced with any particular income-based alternative. I expect the Tory party

to vote to defend its scheme, which is unfair and which punishes pensioners and the ordinary worker.

Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab): Does Tommy Sheridan agree that a parliament is differentiated from an assembly by its ability to raise finance? Of course we could use the 3p tax-varying power to fund things such as free school meals, but that power is a blunt instrument. Income-based local taxation would ensure that there is progressive taxation and redistribution and it would allow the real problems of poverty and deprivation to be tackled. However, does he welcome the review that has been called for, to which we can all submit our comments?

Tommy Sheridan: I welcome both those points. First, I welcome the fact that it is recognised that with an income-based tax we will redistribute wealth in Scotland—we will tax the wealthy and the well paid more and the pensioner and the ordinary worker less. Secondly, I welcome the idea of a local government finance review. The only problem is that, nine months after the commitment was made, we still do not have the review.

The people of Scotland can wait no longer, which is why we are asking members today to unite around the single issue that the council tax should go. Let us contribute to the review as it takes place, but let us at least unite today to ditch the Tory council tax and send some relief to Scotland's millions of pensioners and ordinary workers.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees that the council tax should be abolished and replaced with an income-based alternative.

10:53

The Deputy Minister for Finance and Public Services (Tavish Scott): I move amendment S2M-984.2, to leave out from "council tax" to end and insert:

"forthcoming independent review of local government finance should be asked to conduct a thorough examination of a range of local taxation systems, including the various proposals for an income-based system and reforms to the present council tax system and encourages all those who wish to make meaningful contribution to the review to submit proposals when called upon to do so."

10:54

Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP): During the election, I well remember seeing some SSP posters displayed on the odd lamppost around the place. Those posters did not say, "Vote SSP for our service tax." They said, "Scrap the council tax." I may be wrong, but I do not think that even the Conservatives at the last

election had a manifesto of cutting taxes so, in effect, they were outflanked on the right by Mr Sheridan and his comrades, who made—

Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Will the member give way?

Fergus Ewing: Not just yet. *[Interruption.]* I accept that I am not as far to the right as Tony Blair.

Mr Sheridan and his comrades made their plea not on the basis of their proposals, but to arouse the instincts of people who want to pay less tax. That was a revealing campaigning technique by the SSP during the election.

The SNP has produced a set of proposals that serious commentators in the press have acknowledged as well thought out and detailed. They are based on a fundamental principle that local government taxation should be based on the ability to pay.

Iain Smith (North East Fife) (LD): Will the member give way?

Fergus Ewing: Too early, Iain. I have just started.

Our proposals, which are set out in a paper, are based on replacing the council tax with a local income tax. They would bring an end to the situation where pensioners are paying up to 25 per cent of their net available income on the council tax. In some cases, that means bills of £2,500 a year. Surely we must all recognise that the current system, which is based on property valuations, is unfair. We must recognise that the valuation of one's house is not the same thing as one's ability to pay. We must also recognise that the valuations for the council tax were carried out in 1991, which is 13 years ago, and that there should be a revaluation. If the Labour Party and its friends in the Conservative party, who are thirled to the council tax, believe that the current system should continue, they must acknowledge that there will be a revaluation.

Christine May (Central Fife) (Lab): Is Fergus Ewing therefore making the case for us that, in the proposed review, the valuation bands should be examined and their scope perhaps broadened? Is he saying that, basically, the valuations that were made under the old rates system should be reintroduced?

Fergus Ewing: Not in the slightest. If there is to be a revaluation, a house in Leith, for example, that is currently in band B would, because of the increase in property prices, go up to band D or E. That would mean a further increase of around 40 per cent for people who might be on low incomes.

Let us face it: the days of the council tax are over. We saw the days of the Conservative

Government come to an end because of its unfair poll tax. I believe—and it is the view of my party—that the days of the Labour Party in government will come to an end because of its unfair council tax.

We have produced proposals on which no one has laid a glove. Our proposals recognise, for example, that the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy has concluded that a local income tax would be fairer and easier to administer. I look forward to the campaign ahead. I am confident that our proposals will gain massive support among the people of Scotland, who consider that the council tax is inherently unfair.

10:58

Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I will cut to the chase: there is absolutely no doubt that the council tax is becoming more unpopular in Scotland almost daily, or certainly every spring, when council tax rates are set. We must ask why that is so. I propose that it is because council tax increases have been so great.

Simply to allege that the council tax is unfair and that all other forms of taxation can be fairer is to fail to see what we need to do to ensure that local authorities have adequate resources to deliver crucial public services. We need to recall that 80 per cent of council spending is funded from general taxation, which is based on income tax and consumption taxes, such as VAT and duties. Under those taxes, people who are earning high salaries make significant contributions—often greater contributions as a percentage or in real terms. Therefore, to suggest that only by replacing the council tax with yet another income-based tax will we solve the problem is entirely misleading.

An income-based tax could mean that a group of people would not have to pay a contribution to local services, even though those people might be capital rich and asset wealthy. Surely those people, who use libraries, local theatres, social work services and other amenities that are funded by local authorities, should make a contribution.

The answer lies in making the council tax far fairer than it is at present. I welcome the suggestion in the minister's amendment of a review. Of course we should have a review to ensure that the council tax is applied fairly. However, to suggest that some form of income-based tax might be a solution is seriously to mislead people.

The SNP's proposal is flawed. There is no doubt that the Parliament has powers to vary income tax, to abolish council tax and to be responsible for local authority funding, but whether the Parliament has the powers to vary income tax at more or less than 3p in the basic rate remains to be seen. The

SNP seeks to turn the council tax issue into yet another constitutional question.

In the past, the SNP has been a great supporter of the removal of the 50 per cent discount on second homes. Where does that suggestion lie in relation to the introduction of a local income tax? Owners of such properties may live outside the local authority area and perhaps even outside Scotland. The argument is that the holidaymakers or second-home owners use services, but how will those people contribute to local services if they cannot be taxed through the local income tax?

As well as the suggestion that a local income tax would be fair, it is argued that we need economic growth. Economic growth must be generated by small businesses and self-employed people. However, under such a tax—unlike under a corporation tax—those people would be penalised more unfairly than the large corporations would be. There are serious flaws in the suggested replacements for the council tax. We support a review and we will support the amendment.

11:02

Christine May (Central Fife) (Lab): It is a truth universally acknowledged that the ability to tax and please is not given to men, or in my case, to women. Nobody likes paying tax.

Any local tax system must have four key elements for success. It must be visible—people should be able to see what they are paying for. It must be accountable and as fair as possible—I think that Lord Camden said that taxation and representation are inseparable. It must be as simple as possible to administer and collect. Finally, it must be difficult to avoid and it must produce as much revenue as possible for services.

A property-based tax is almost impossible to avoid. I find it strange that those members on the benches opposite who claim to be socialists are against a tax on property. Council tax collection rates are more than 90 per cent and rising. In my authority, the figure is more than 97 per cent and the target for next year is 98 per cent, which is as near to full payment as possible.

Shona Robison (Dundee East) (SNP) rose—

Christine May: I am very tight for time.

The proposal is a complicated, difficult-to-administer and easy-to-avoid tax that will not provide the link with local elected representatives.

Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): Will the member give way?

Christine May: No, I am going to finish my point.

The proposed tax would be ducked by the wealthy, who could find a way round it; it would hit working families on lower wages harder than the council tax does; it would put at risk the £300 million in council tax benefit that the Department for Work and Pensions currently pays; and it would be a nightmare to administer.

I invite members to think for a moment about a small firm in the Levenmouth area of my constituency, which might employ folk from Fife, Perth and Kinross, Angus and Clackmannanshire. As that firm does not have a computerised payroll system, it would have to identify any local income tax or Scottish service tax separately from other taxation elements. What sort of burden would that produce? What difference might that make to the company's viability? How would such a system endear local government to those who were affected?

I do not agree with Tommy Sheridan that the council tax should be abolished. However, I agree that all parties should support the proposals for the review of the current system, including the consideration of alternatives, but also the consideration of widening council tax bands to take account of the rise in house prices. The trouble with Tommy's Trots is that they are deceitful as well as populist. To pretend that there is a fairy at the bottom of a mythical garden in every locality who will happily pay so that everybody else does not have to is a despicable myth. The problem is that, with those who currently pay for local services through the council tax—as with those who buy lottery tickets—credulity is always in fashion. They want to believe Tommy Sheridan, but he is deceiving them. He is despicable.

Tommy Sheridan: Come on, Presiding Officer.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member might reflect on that last comment.

Christine May: I am happy to withdraw that remark.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That is appropriate.

I regret to inform the four members who had hoped to take part in the open debate that I must now go to Tavish Scott's winding-up speech.

11:06

Tavish Scott: I will deal with the main arguments that have been presented today. I listened carefully to what Mr Sheridan said: he argued that we should scrap the council tax today. In the real world, we cannot scrap the council tax today; we could not scrap any taxation system that we have today. Local government and the agencies that it supports through its funding

system must have a mechanism to ensure that the funding continues. That is why a review is the right way in which to proceed and why the Executive has lodged the amendment in my name. It is wholly untrue that we can today make the changes that Tommy Sheridan suggests.

Tommy Sheridan: Will the minister give way?

Tavish Scott: No. I am going to deal with the member's wider points.

The SSP has had five debates on the Scottish service tax, but the main point that we have learned about it is that it has been rejected by five of the seven parties that are represented in Parliament. Curiously, Mr Sheridan has found a tax that is even more unpopular than he would have us believe the council tax is. He keeps telling us that his option is the favoured one, but the Local Government Committee in the previous session of Parliament was robust in its destruction of the Scottish service tax. It is important to consider closely what that committee said. I quote directly from that committee's report on the issue:

"having examined in detail the proposals for a Scottish Service Tax, the Committee sees no merit in this option because the proposal as outlined in ... written evidence to the Committee would replace Scotland's only local tax with a new, national tax; leave councils in Scotland wholly dependent on central government for their funding; and would, in the Committee's view, destroy local accountability for councils' spending decisions."

I rather suspect that that is why five out of the seven parties in the Parliament reject Mr Sheridan's proposals.

Mr Sheridan has been comprehensively defeated every time he exposes his tax, but today he seeks to portray himself as a bringer of consensus to local government, which is a curious concept indeed. Unless Mr Sheridan has abandoned his proposals and converted to either a local income tax or the council tax, he is not part of any growing consensus about a solution. By telling people to run up long-term debts through not paying their council tax, he seeks only to add to the sum of human misery.

Mr Ewing made an interesting speech, although I would find anything interesting after reading his profile in *Holyrood* magazine. I am sure that many colleagues would like to reflect on the content of that article. The SNP runs hot and cold on the subject. To be fair, the SNP's 1997 manifesto contained a proposal for a local income tax, but it had gone off the idea by 1999—the proposal was not in the party's manifesto in that year, although the party called for a wide-ranging review of local government finance. The SNP was completely silent on the subject in 2001.

Mrs Margaret Ewing (Moray) (SNP): Will the minister give way?

Tavish Scott: Let me complete the litany, if I may.

In 2003, the SNP was a little vague. The manifesto commitment was to an independent review of local government finance and a fairer system based on the ability to pay. It would be helpful if the SNP was clear on the issue.

The SNP has now produced proposals, but Mr Ewing must be careful about how he articulates them. In the article in *Holyrood* he appeared to me, in supporting George W Bush on a number of issues, to be close to supporting a flat tax. Indeed, he nearly supports Mr Monteith on the reintroduction of the poll tax.

Fergus Ewing rose—

Tavish Scott: I am in my last minute and we have heard Mr Ewing already—we all enjoyed what he said, but we have heard it.

Iain Smith, Christine May and others will have the chance to develop their proposals and alternatives and to discuss the structure of the council tax as part of the forthcoming review. The Executive is committed to establishing the review as part of the partnership agreement. The review will be extensive and will represent the most serious examination of local taxation ever undertaken in Scotland. All taxation alternatives will have to be compared against agreed tests of fairness, economic impact, ability to pay, collection and cost of implementation.

Mr Sheridan has a short time today to decide whether to stick with his isolated position of banging on about a tax that has been rejected by five of the seven parties or to shift his ground to try to be part of our consensus.

Mrs Ewing: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. An aspect of debates that worries me is that a rule appears to be developing that no interventions are accepted in the final minute of a member's speech. It is not my understanding that such a rule is written into the standing orders. The final minute of a speech is being used by many members, including the minister just now, to make personalised and political attacks.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There is no such rule in the standing orders. It is a convention to allow for the smooth handling of debates. I draw to the attention of members the fact that Mr Swinburne took two interventions in his final minute and managed to finish his speech just three or four seconds over his allocated time. If members are prepared to absorb an intervention in their last minute, that is their choice. In a debate with a tight timescale, I cannot allow members to take an intervention in their last minute and then take more time than they have been allocated. We are now losing time quite seriously.

Mark Ballard (Lothians) (Green): Is it appropriate under the standing orders to have a debate in which no opportunity is given for an open debate? I refer to the fact that no opportunity has been given to members from one of the parties in the Parliament to contribute to this important debate.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Ballard should be aware that the standing orders do not cover such issues. The authority for having the debate is that it was approved in a motion put by the Parliamentary Bureau to the Parliament and passed by the Parliament. That is the basis on which the debate is proceeding, regardless of the unfortunate consequences that follow from it in terms of the allocation of time. We are now behind the clock again.

11:12

Tommy Sheridan: Presiding Officer, you would think that highly paid ministers such as Tavish Scott, who earns over £80,000, would be able to read the motion before us, which is:

"That the Parliament agrees that the council tax should be abolished and replaced with an income-based alternative."

I have asked people to vote on that motion today.

Tavish Scott rose—

Tommy Sheridan: I am sorry, but would the minister mind behaving himself? That is hard, when he represents a party that fights an election on a commitment to abolish the council tax but then goes into government with a party that has no intention of abolishing it—Christine May stated that clearly.

Mike Rumbles: Is that not entirely the point? If a vote is taken tonight on Tommy Sheridan's motion without amendment, it will go down. Two parties in the chamber have come together to form a majority that can defeat Mr Sheridan's motion. The amendment will be passed tonight because we have an opportunity to change the council tax by consensus.

Tommy Sheridan: The problem is that we are a wee bit behind the ordinary people of Scotland, who have expressed their opinions in two opinion polls. In 2001, 73 per cent of Scots wanted the council tax to be replaced by an income-based alternative. When the same question was asked by System 3 last month, 77 per cent of Scots said that they wanted the council tax to be replaced by an income-based alternative.

I remind Labour Party members such as Christine May who are trying to deceive the people of Scotland about what we are talking about in this debate that we are not talking about people not paying for local services. We are talking about

those who can afford to do so paying more for local services so that pensioners and low-paid workers can pay less.

I am not surprised that the Parliament has rejected the Scottish service tax because, under our proposals, MSPs will pay an average of £3,000 a year. That is about £2,000 more than they are now paying. The minister will pay significantly more because he can afford to do so. That is the reality. People such as the minister and chief executives across the country—

Tavish Scott rose—

Tommy Sheridan: I am sorry, but the minister did not see fit to let me in so maybe he can sit and listen now.

The Parliament needs to recognise that the council tax is no longer acceptable.

Mike Rumbles: The people will not vote for the SSP's alternative.

Tommy Sheridan: It is not good enough for Mike Rumbles to come here nine months after the review was promised. I wanted to intervene when the minister spoke earlier about "today, today, today". I will allow him to speak if he can tell me today who is on the review of local government finance. When does it meet?

Tavish Scott: Mr Sheridan should know the answer to that question because it has been answered earlier. We will announce the review when we are ready to do so.

Tommy Sheridan: Sit down.

Tavish Scott: No, Mr Sheridan should sit down and I will answer his question.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Tommy Sheridan: I have taken his intervention.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order. Mr Sheridan, you gave way to the minister.

Tommy Sheridan: I am asking him to sit down because he has finished.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The minister can make his point.

Tommy Sheridan: He has got nothing to say.

Tavish Scott: The Parliament is aware that we are discussing this with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. If Mr Sheridan does not like that and does not like local government, he should make that clear.

Tommy Sheridan: That was an interesting intervention. The minister said that he is in discussions with COSLA, but maybe it would be better if he discussed the nursery nurses' dispute with that organisation.

The minister has discussed the review with COSLA for nine months. He has refused to act on the wishes of the people of Scotland, who want council tax to be replaced by a fairer system. I invite him to come to Glasgow on 24 April to march with those who are opposed to council tax. *[Interruption.]* It is difficult for me to ignore Fergus Ewing's cheap shots because I do not think they befit the maturity of the debate. I hope that the SNP, the SSP, the Greens and others can unite to ditch the council tax. We should put our political differences behind us and put the interests of Scotland's ordinary workers and pensioners first. That is what the minister cannot do.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Before I proceed to the next item of business, I wish to make a point for the benefit of the public gallery, which is unusually full today and where people have sat politely and quietly through a considerable amount of business this morning. This is a meeting of Parliament; it is not a campaign rally or a public meeting. Persons in the gallery should be aware—if they are not, I will make it clear now—that they are expected not to applaud or to call out. I hope that they will sit and listen to the next debate with the courtesy and common sense with which they have listened so far.

Nursery Nurses

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh):

The next item of business is a debate on motion S2M-985, in the name of Carolyn Leckie, on nursery nurses, a just claim, and two amendments to that motion.

11:18

Frances Curran (West of Scotland) (SSP):

I welcome all the nursery nurses who are in the Parliament today and those who are lobbying outside at the moment. *[Applause.]* We are allowed to clap.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You are.

Frances Curran: Some of us have no problem with applause from the balconies.

I would like to declare an interest in the debate. I am the parent of a four-year-old who is affected by the dispute. I make it clear that like many other parents I support the nursery nurses 100 per cent in their just claim for decent pay and a decent career structure. I think that I speak on behalf of other parents when I say that I appreciate the time, energy and care that nursery nurses invest in my son and thousands of other children each day. My son thrives in his nursery, which is a lovely place and a great environment. The children who attend the nursery learn many things, including social skills. Some nurseries can have 80 children. When I return in the afternoon to collect my son, I am aware that a great deal of energy has been spent by nursery nurses during the day. I could not do their job and I am sure that neither could many other MSPs. We should recognise that it needs a certain commitment and a certain type of person.

Nursery nurses have a huge responsibility for the future generations. The Executive thinks so too, because it has given nursery nurses more and more responsibilities. Their job has changed completely since their most recent pay review. They are responsible for the three-to-five curriculum, assessing students, serving children, liaising with other professionals such as speech therapists, health visitors, psychologists and occupational therapists, and assessing special-needs children. It is not widely known that nursery nurses who work with special-needs children work with pupils aged up to 18. They are in schools working alongside teachers, but there is a massive difference in their pay. They have to work with young people with complex learning needs and keep up to date with research on conditions such as autism. All that is packed into their job.

Who is giving them all that responsibility? The Parliament—the Executive was responsible, but the Parliament voted for it, so we have given them

all that responsibility. The MSPs who will vote on the motion—the vote is not until 5 o'clock this afternoon—never had any problem putting up their hands and voting for an early-years education system to be proud of. They never had any problem putting up their hands and voting to give nursery nurses more responsibilities when they are in the nurseries day in, day out. However, when they are asked to put up their hands and say, “We believe that you should have a national career structure and that you are worth £13,000 to £18,000 a year,” they say, “Oh no, it's nothing to do with us. No, no, no, we don't even have a view on it. That is up to the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. That is up to local government. That is up to somebody else.” That is double standards, it is rich and it is utter hypocrisy.

I know that some MSPs took part this week in a special edition of “University Challenge”. It is a big secret who won, but we will no doubt hear on the grapevine. They competed against a group of MPs from Westminster—sorry, I have just been reminded that it was against members from Wales; I wonder who would have won had it been MPs.

Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind): What was their starter for 10?

Frances Curran: I was just about to say that I will give those who did not have the opportunity to take part a starter for 10. Who said that the Executive would recommend tying funding for local authorities and Scottish Enterprise to their promotion of equal opportunities, such as enforcing equal pay for men and women? The answer is Margaret Curran, the Minister for Communities. Monday was international women's day. The Executive trotted out all the statistics that we hear year in, year out—the annual list on the difference between men's pay and women's low pay. We know why there is low pay for women. It is because women workers are concentrated in jobs involving cleaning, child care and caring. Those jobs are underpaid and undervalued by society and the nursery nurses are a case in point; they are undervalued by Parliaments, politicians and society as a whole.

I appeal to all the women on the Labour benches, especially those who signed the motion on international women's day—some of them would even call themselves feminists—to stand up for what they believe in and put their money where their mouth is. Ordinary MSPs are sitting here on £50,000 a year and ministers are sitting on £77,000.

Members: What about you?

Frances Curran: We take half our wage. The difference is that I think that the nursery nurses are worth £18,000. I put my money where my

mouth is and I am out on the picket line supporting them.

I am asking Labour women today to come off the fence and vote for the motion to say to COSLA, "Get to the negotiating table, negotiate a just claim and give the nursery nurses a national deal." I ask them to say openly to the nursery nurses, "We've got confidence that you are worth £18,000." Give them the money now.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees that the nursery nurses have a just claim and that there should be a fair, nationally negotiated settlement to their current dispute.

11:24

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton (Lothians) (Con): I state from the outset that the Scottish Conservatives believe that the issue of nursery nurses' pay is primarily between COSLA and Unison. We believe that a review of nursery nurses' pay has been needed desperately, because of the increased duties and tasks that they have taken on over the years. Furthermore, we are in favour of national guidelines, with the final pay and conditions set by the local authority, which would better reflect local circumstances. For example, Aberdeen City Council has agreed an annual contract for a 36-and-a-quarter-hour week, with a salary starting at £17,340 and rising to a top level of £19,029, which is more than £1,000 more than the top rate that Unison is demanding. Our party believes that Aberdeen City Council has shown a way forward in settling the dispute—indeed nine of the 32 councils have settled.

I echo the concerns of the Scottish Independent Nurseries Association, the representative group of private nursery nurses. SINA understands more than most that nursery nurses are undervalued, but it fears that there will be repercussions for the private sector if Unison achieves its demands. It estimates that fees at independent nurseries will rise by about 30 per cent in order to match the wages offered to local authority staff. The independent and voluntary sectors have been at the forefront of development in pre-school education, offering a more flexible service than do local authority pre-school nurseries. The independent sector offers a full 10-hour day, which is essential for some working parents who require pre-school education to offer facilities for longer hours than those offered by local authority nurseries. Therefore, if COSLA meets in full Unison's pay demands, the parents who depend on the flexibility of the independent nurseries could be hit hardest.

Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP): What James Douglas-Hamilton said is entirely consistent: the Tories do not believe in national

pay bargaining or the public sector. That is fine, but does he accept that the nine councils that have settled cover a minority of Scotland's nursery nurses, more than 4,000 of whom are still on strike?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Yes, of course I accept what the member said. However, I make to him the obvious point that the Labour councillor Frank Russell made on 5 March. He said:

"There cannot be a single agreement for nursery nurses Scotland wide. This is simply a non-starter as the job is different in different parts of the country. In addition COSLA believes that it is unjust if the agreement does not take account of the fact that school nursery nurses are working only 39 weeks in the year whilst others are working 48 or 52 weeks a year. Annual salaries must reflect these differences."

It must be remembered that the national child care strategy stressed that pre-school education must be affordable. However, Unison's demands for a national settlement could have the opposite effect on independent nurseries to that which is intended. I stress strongly that David McLetchie called on Unison to make a special dispensation for children with special educational needs. I repeat that call and look forward to an enlightened response from Unison.

Many have said that the issue is not just about low pay, but about inequality. The allegation is that nursery nurses are not paid a higher wage because the profession is made up predominantly of women and the job is seen as women's work. As I stated, the local deal agreed by Aberdeen City Council is a beacon of light, pointing the way to solutions for other councils. It is our conviction that nursery nurses are not recognised for the fundamental work that they do in teaching children in their early years. We believe that underlying attitudes must change towards nursery education so that genuine recognition of nursery nurses' work and a salary that reflects that can come about.

I move amendment S2M-985.1, to leave out from "agrees" to end and insert:

"supports local pay bargaining; welcomes the settlement by nine local authorities, but calls on UNISON to make a special dispensation for children who have special educational needs due to the severe impact that the strike has on them and their families."

11:29

The Deputy Minister for Education and Young People (Euan Robson): I will just move amendment S2M-985.2 at the moment, to give other members a chance to contribute. I will speak later.

I move amendment S2M-985.2, to leave out from "agrees" to end and insert:

"recognises the importance of the pre-five sector to securing the best possible start to life for Scotland's young people and the priority the Scottish Executive has given to pre-five provision; welcomes the significant progress in pre-school education entitlement for three and four-year-olds achieved over recent years; emphasises that nursery nurses and others in the early years workforce should receive pay that is fair to them and is financially sustainable; notes grading settlements made to date; urges COSLA to do all it can to support a resolution to the current dispute; further urges the local authority employers and unions to continue negotiations, and encourages the Executive to push forward with plans to secure improved workforce planning, qualifications structure and career pathways for the early years workforce as a means of securing recognition of the commitment and professionalism of pre-five workers, greater opportunities and equality in the workplace for this predominantly female workforce."

11:29

Brian Adam (Aberdeen North) (SNP): The debate about nursery nurses' pay has been going on for far too long. The first motion on it in the Scottish Parliament was debated in July 2001. My former colleague Mike Russell lodged a motion that called on the Executive—which has a role to play today, in spite of its rather woolly-worded amendment—and COSLA to review the low levels of pay that nursery nurses receive.

I think that that call, which is almost three years old, is still valid today. However, I do not think that we should be only at the stage of reviewing nursery nurses' pay; I think that we should be at the stage of having a settlement. Lord James Douglas-Hamilton rightly pointed out that there have been a number of settlements across the country and highlighted one in the city that I represent. I welcome the fact that the dispute has been resolved in some areas. However, I regard those local resolutions as interim solutions. There is no doubt that much of what nursery nurses do today is decided by the standards that are set at a national level. I believe that COSLA is ducking its responsibilities by dodging the issue and hiding behind grading revisions.

As someone who represented another group of staff at a national level for many years in the national health service, I was always aware that there was grade drift between local authorities. That did not detract in any way from the value of having a national settlement that meant that people were delivering the same services to the same standard across the board. That situation firmly applies to nursery nurses. It is high time that we resolved this matter.

I am disappointed that the Conservatives and the Executive have lodged amendments to Carolyn Leckie's simple, straightforward and easily supported motion. I have no hesitation in offering the full support of the Scottish National Party to the motion.

The Conservatives' reliance on local pay bargaining is disappointing but at least consistent. Across a range of public sector areas, the Conservatives do not believe in national pay bargaining, largely on the basis that they think that they can buy people off in the areas in which there is high unemployment and no great demand for what I suppose we might call a commercial solution.

More disappointing than the Conservative's position is the Executive's attempt to rewrite history in its amendment. Buried in the middle of the amendment is a phrase that I find quite concerning. The amendment calls for a pay settlement that is fair to nurses and "financially sustainable". That is Governmentspeak for, "We're nae gaun tae gie ye onie money because we don't think we can afford it." I am not sure why that phrase is in there unless it is to give an appearance that the Executive parties are supporting the nursery nurses while saying to COSLA that the Executive has no more money to give local authorities to ensure that nursery nurses are given a fair wage.

It is also disappointing that the Executive makes reference to nursery nurses being a predominantly female work force. The Executive almost uses that fact as an excuse for not paying them a fair and proper wage.

11:33

Margaret Jamieson (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab): I declare an interest, as a member of Unison and a mother of a qualified nursery nurse.

In our previous debate on the subject of nursery nurses, I asked the minister to do all in his power to ensure that COSLA resolves the dispute by entering into meaningful negotiations with the trade unions that represent early-years educators in Scotland. The following day, 25 September 2003, I asked him to give further consideration to the speeches that members had made the previous evening on the need to bring about a resolution to the dispute.

Here we are, six months down the road, and nursery nurses are on an indefinite strike. I ask the minister whether he has had any discussion with COSLA during that time or whether COSLA has treated him in the same shabby way as it treated the trade unions representing the nursery nurses.

It is unacceptable for COSLA to hide behind the cloak of job evaluation schemes when the parameters have not been published and will not be binding on the 32 Scottish councils. That begs the question of how some local agreements stack up.

In 1996, the European Commission network on child care set quality targets for services for young children, which covered wages, basic training, continuous training and the right to be a trade union member, and stated that 20 per cent of the work force should be male. Has COSLA considered its obligations in relation to those quality targets? Does it know that they exist?

The Scottish Executive has invested heavily in child care to the tune of £928.5 million and COSLA has never been slow to accept the money. In 2000, we published "Working with Children: A guide to Qualifications and Careers in Early Education, Childcare and Playwork" and a follow-up action report that was supported by a further £3.9 million for 2000 and 2001. We have paid for expansion and for staff training and development. By financial resolution, we have also paid for the provisions of the Regulation of Care (Scotland) Act 2001. However, COSLA continues to ignore the rightful claims of nursery nurses.

We have a professional work force in the early-years sector. That will be further demonstrated later this year when nursery nurses are required to register with the Scottish Social Services Council, demonstrating their qualifications and their continuing professional development, if they are to be allowed to practise in Scotland.

All those issues will also be considered when inspections take place. I hope that the inspectors will rattle the cage of those local authorities that have paid no heed to their obligations.

The members of the Executive parties value nursery nurses. We cannot allow the pay gap between men and women to continue. I welcome the statement by Joe Di Paola of Unison in an interview last Sunday that consideration is being given to lodging claims for equal pay for work of equal value.

It is time for Pat Watters and COSLA to stop the slagging and to get round the table to negotiate a settlement with Unison that involves national grading and national pay. That will allow our nursery nurses to return to the job that they are qualified to do: providing our children, who are our future, with the best start in life.

I support the amendment in the minister's name.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am afraid that the clock has beaten us. I express my regrets to the members who had hoped to take part in the opening debate but we must now commence the closing speeches.

11:39

Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to contribute to the debate. We have debated this subject in the

Parliament before but we have to be honest and recognise the limits of our authority. We have to recognise the difficulties that confront the employers and the union negotiators in this matter and consider what the Executive and the Scottish Parliament can do. That is what the Executive amendment does.

The position that we are in has been reached partly because of the decision on the single-status agreement. I do not always automatically argue the trade union case in the Scottish Parliament; I do not see that as my job and I know that every union member who takes industrial action is confident that their position is the correct one. However, in this case, I think that the issues are so important that the Executive and the Parliament must consider what we can and should do to resolve the dispute. I believe that the Executive amendment offers a way forward.

I cannot overstate the importance of the pre-five sector and nursery teachers, nursery nurses and other workers in that area. Much of the increase in work and responsibilities in the sector has come about because the Scottish Executive, the Labour members of it and the Labour women MSPs are so committed to the key role of the sector in supporting social inclusion and tackling poverty.

Tommy Sheridan: Will the member take an intervention?

Johann Lamont: I am happy to debate the issues but I have only limited time for my speech.

The pre-five sector is particularly important to women who want to work, especially lone parents. We also acknowledge the crucial role of the sector for children in vulnerable and chaotic families. Every day, nursery staff reach out and support those vulnerable children.

The dispute impacts disproportionately on women. It impacts on the women who predominate in the sector and on those who are now juggling their commitments as a consequence of the dispute. One of the issues around the dispute is the fact that the consequences are hidden, which might be why it is not being taken as seriously as it should be.

The heart of the issue is low pay and the pay gap that women experience, which is a structural problem. I have asked before whether women predominate in the nursery sector because it is low paid or whether those crucial jobs are low paid because women are doing them. We must grapple with that problem by working with the local authorities and others. It is essential that nursery nurse pay is sorted out, because of the importance of the job, because of our commitment to social inclusion and the best start for all our young people and because of our commitment to closing the pay gap.

We understand that we are where we are in the dispute. The Executive has a role in delivering a national review of the sector. Carolyn Leckie's motion is fine; the Labour amendment adds to it because it creates not an aspiration but a way forward.

Tommy Sheridan: Will the member explain why she is willing to remove the key sentence in the SSP motion, which is about the fact that there should be a nationally agreed pay settlement? The Executive amendment removes that.

Johann Lamont: Because a national review of the sector would create a national set of pay conditions, which would sort that problem. I believe that there should be national grading for the whole of the nursery sector, and a national review would deliver that. The review would expose the gap between what we expect women to do and what we pay them for doing it. It offers a more serious way forward than the aspiration in the motion.

I hope that members and the Executive acknowledge that our amendment will not just get us by today; it is a serious attempt to consider how to resolve the dispute, whether we pay proper respect to those who work in the sector, and how we do the hard job of negotiating how to close the pay gap and give proper remuneration for a central job in our local communities.

Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I am extremely unhappy with the way in which the speeches have been taken. Euan Robson gave up the opening speech to allow other members a bit more time for a ridiculously short debate. The SSP chose the subject for a debate of three quarters of an hour, when it could have given it the whole period of debate if it had wanted to. The result is that there has been no Liberal Democrat opening speech. That totally distorts the balance of representation in the Parliament and is entirely unsatisfactory. I ask for your views on that.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I have no view. My position is to defend the standing orders and the resolutions that the Parliament has passed. If the member is unhappy with the outcome of the procedure, he has two options: he can raise it through his party representative on the Parliamentary Bureau; or he can raise it with the Procedures Committee, which may choose to take up the matter with the bureau and recommend a change to standing orders.

I can only express my regret at the amount of time that has been lost. The longer we prolong such exchanges, the more time I have to take from other members. I already require to take a minute from the members who remain to speak.

Robert Brown: On a further point of order, Presiding Officer. The fact remains that there was no opening speech for the Liberal Democrats. That is not in accordance with standing orders and is not conducive to a balanced debate in the chamber.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member is wrong. Mr Robson had an opening speech. He chose to move the motion formally, and that is within his rights. That is what he chose to do.

We are burning away time that we do not have.

11:44

Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con): It is difficult to sum up a debate of this type and duration, but I will try to do so.

In her opening remarks, Frances Curran made some points with which we agree. She highlighted and spoke eloquently about the increased duties that nursery nurses have had imposed upon them in recent years. That point was well made. However, she failed to realise that her argument that there is an attitude in the Parliament that the matter is nothing to do with us has no validity. Strictly speaking, the issue is nothing to do with us because it is a matter for Unison and COSLA. If we carry on introducing to the chamber debates that are not strictly within the Parliament's remit, we will lose more time in which to get on with what the Parliament should be doing. That is why I found Frances Curran's argument lacking in credibility.

Brian Adam's opening remarks were correct when he said that the dispute has gone on for far too long. There is no one in the chamber who wants it to be prolonged or for the settlement to be other than fair and just. However, it is spurious to suggest that the settlement should be based on a nationally agreed format. Clearly, there are different responsibilities, pressures and duties in different parts of Scotland. The Aberdeen negotiation has resulted in a settlement well above—

Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab) *rose*—

Tommy Sheridan: Will the member give way?

Bill Aitken: I am genuinely sorry that I cannot take any interventions, but I do not have the time.

All new Labour purists will have regarded Margaret Jamieson's speech as being decidedly off message. She seemed to excoriate COSLA, Pat Watters in particular and the Labour Executive. I found it extraordinary that she said in her closing remarks that she would support the Executive's amendment. Given her contribution, that seemed to be, at best, an exercise in

completely misguided thinking or, at worst, sheer hypocrisy.

COSLA and the union should be seeking to bring the dispute to the earliest possible conclusion in the most favourable possible circumstances for all concerned. That will not be done on the basis of national negotiations.

I support Lord James Douglas-Hamilton's amendment.

11:47

Mr Adam Ingram (South of Scotland) (SNP): I am pleased to confirm that the SNP will support Carolyn Leckie's motion. We believe that the case for a national deal for nursery nurses—providing decent pay and a proper career structure—is incontrovertible. None of us, least of all the nursery nurses, wanted the current situation to arise, with hundreds of council nurseries closed, thousands of dedicated workers on indefinite strike and many more children and their parents suffering disruption to care and education routines.

Unlike other members in the debate who want to pass the buck to COSLA, I do not believe that anything less than direct intervention from the Executive will bring about a lasting settlement of the dispute. The mantra that ministers have adopted of non-intervention, frankly, is no longer credible, if it ever was.

The Executive has made great play of the major investment that it is making in early-years education, laying down national strategies, care standards and curricula. I do not understand how ministers can fail to see that all those plans will come to nought if they continue to undervalue and demotivate the skilled work force that they need to deliver all that.

Hiding behind the single-status agreement between COSLA and the unions just will not do. All too often, COSLA betrays an offensive and patronising attitude, which we have heard again today from the Tories, who have said that the nurses work for only 39 weeks per year and that their job is different in different parts of the country. The comparators cited are non-teaching staff such as school secretaries and administrators. The real comparison should be with teachers and the McCrone deal. There is overwhelming support for that view among parents, which explains, in part, the huge sympathy for the nursery nurses among the public at large.

Let me illustrate my speech with an example from South Ayrshire, where a nursery nurse who had done two years' study and had five years' experience ended up teaching a probationary nursery teacher how to teach in a nursery school.

The fact is that a probationary teacher's salary is 1.5 times the salary of a nursery nurse. That illustrates how badly nursery nurses are undervalued and the lack of recognition and respect that they are afforded by their employers. Ministers, who know that to be the case, should be ashamed of themselves.

I urge all members to support the nursery nurses by voting for the motion.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Euan Robson to close for the Executive. You have five minutes, but I cannot extend that in any way.

11:50

Euan Robson: We have heard some thoughtful contributions in this short debate.

Let me be clear that the Executive believes that nursery nurses and others who work in the early-years sector carry out an extremely important role. Indeed, by taking action to invest more money in pre-five provision, the Executive has expanded the sector dramatically and put it on the map, such that today the sector comprises more than 26,000 workers, or 1 per cent of Scotland's work force. Nursery nurses work with our children at a crucial stage in their development and help them to meet their full potential. Without the dedication and quality service of our nursery nurses, we would not have had such progress in providing pre-school education entitlement for all three and four-year-olds.

Like all members, I want to see our early-years work force being paid a fair salary at a sustainable level. The dispute has gone on too long. Both sides need to get together to sort it out. I urge them to do just that.

Shona Robison (Dundee East) (SNP): Will the minister join me in condemning the shameful actions of Dundee City Council's Labour-Lib Dem administration, which phoned the parents of children with special needs to encourage them to go to the press to criticise nursery nurses for going on strike? Does the minister agree that that is a shameful action for a local authority to take during the dispute?

Euan Robson: I have no knowledge of that local situation, but in a moment I will mention what SNP councils have done.

The Parliament should be aware that, in 1999, the unions and employers agreed and signed the single-status agreement, which was designed to create a fairer method of determining pay. Under the single-status agreement, the responsibility for setting the pay of staff in their areas who are covered by the agreement rests with local councils. To date, nine councils have settled their disputes. In areas where the dispute has been

settled, the predominantly female work force has received a pay increase.

Karen Gillon: Will the minister give way?

Euan Robson: No, I want to deal with the SNP.

The SNP is negotiating at local level in Angus and in Falkirk. In Highland, the SNP member who is education chairman is negotiating locally and is likely to settle the dispute locally. Do not listen to what SNP members say, but look at what they do.

Over the years, the work of our early-years work force has changed and it will continue to develop. To recognise the importance of the work force and to help it to meet the demands of 21st century early-years services, the Executive wants to get on with a number of measures that are aimed at development and reform. Over the next two years, we will allocate £12 million of work force development funding to local authorities to help workers to gain access to the qualifications that they will need to register with the Scottish Social Services Council and to deliver the high-quality services that we all expect.

I agree that the status of the sector should be higher than it currently is. Registration with the Scottish Social Services Council will go some way towards helping that, but we will also consider ways of establishing clear career structures for workers in the sector.

Karen Gillon: Regardless of the single-status agreement, there is a clear need for a national framework for the pay and conditions of nursery nurses. Will the minister accept that there is a need for an independent review of nursery nurses' pay and conditions similar to the review that was given to the teaching profession and that the Executive has a duty to lead on that?

Euan Robson: No.

Other professions provide—*[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Euan Robson: The position is quite clear. Under the single-status agreement, it is for local authorities to negotiate with their work forces. If there are further developments that we can take after the dispute is settled, we will consider those at that point in time. However, let me say quite clearly that we want the status of the profession to rise. As I said, we believe that registration with the Scottish Social Services Council will go some way towards helping that, but we will also consider how clear career structures might be established for workers in the sector.

Other professions provide opportunities for career progression and for lateral movement, so that people are given scope to develop in a different direction within a broad professional grouping. A career in early education and child

care should be no different. To achieve that, we need a rationalised and modern qualifications framework that takes proper account of our integrated children's services agenda.

We want to get on—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The minister must close now. There is simply no further time.

Euan Robson: Well, okay—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I apologise.

I call Carolyn Leckie to close for the SSP. I can allow her an absolute maximum of five minutes.

11:56

Carolyn Leckie (Central Scotland) (SSP): I welcome all sister members of Unison who are in the public gallery. In particular, I welcome Joan and all the nursery nurses from North Lanarkshire, as well as all the special-needs nursery nurses who are present. Like Lord James Douglas-Hamilton, I recognise the special job that they do. That is why they deserve more pay, which should be paid on a national basis. That is the reason why they are on strike.

It is an absolute disgrace that, after 16 years without a review, 10 months of intermittent strike action and two weeks of all-out strike, nursery nurses still do not have decent national pay for a highly skilled, professional, national job.

Robert Brown: Will the member take an intervention?

Carolyn Leckie: I have limited time. I apologise.

I do not have time to go into all the details, so let us get to the crux of the issue, which is today's vote on the Executive amendment to my motion. The Executive amendment would leave out "just claim". Why? I believe that the nursery nurses have a just claim, but does the Executive believe that?

The Executive amendment would not require COSLA to settle the dispute nationally, which is the very source of the impasse. The Executive has been prepared to set a national early-years curriculum and to establish a care commission that sets and enforces national standards in care and education, so why does it remain silent on the issue of a national pay and careers structure for the people who deliver those standards? No matter where in Scotland nursery nurses work—from Wishaw to Dundee—they should have the same pay and careers structure.

The Executive amendment

"urges COSLA to do all it can to support a resolution to the current dispute"

and

"further urges the local authority employers and unions to continue negotiations".

However, COSLA has been willing to participate only in local negotiations. The Executive amendment is saying, albeit creatively, that the Executive opposes a national settlement. The Executive amendment is like junk food: it is empty calories; it has no substance; it has no real meat; and it certainly offers no sustenance to nursery nurses.

Teachers, the police and nurses all have national pay for doing national jobs, albeit in different schools, police stations and hospitals. Councillors even want national pay for themselves. When Pat Watters gave evidence to the Local Government and Transport Committee to demand £25,000 a year for councillors, he was asked whether councillors in Glasgow and Edinburgh perhaps did a different job from councillors in Inverness and elsewhere. "Absolutely not," he said, "we need national pay." If national pay is good enough for Pat Watters, it is good enough for the nursery nurses.

And what about MSPs? We are all on national pay, yet we represent different local employers, who are the voters. If we were to put our pay out to local negotiations in our constituencies, how much would Bill Aitken or Euan Robson receive?

I appeal to the many people in the chamber who have trade union history and support and to those who shout about pay discrimination and the way in which women are undervalued. I am being serious. Even if the full claim was won, nursery nurses would still be a full £7,000 a year behind the average male wage. The claim is just. All members know fine well the duty of solidarity. They know that if there is no national settlement to the dispute while the nursery nurses are all on strike, they will be consigned to low and unequal pay for a very long time—they know what a strike means.

A review is double-speak for defeat. I urge members to vote for substance, not empty calories. I urge them to ask how the nursery nurses would want them to vote. They know what the issue is and they know how they would vote: they would vote for the SSP motion, unamended. We must not let them down. Victory to the nursery nurses!

First Minister's Question Time

12:00

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): It is 12 noon and time for questions to the First Minister.

Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

The Presiding Officer: Unless it is absolutely essential, may I take your point of order at the end of First Minister's question time, Mr McNulty?

Des McNulty: It is to do with the rights of members, but I am happy to leave it until the end of First Minister's question time.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you. That is helpful.

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-707)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): When I next speak to the Prime Minister, I am sure that we will discuss this morning's events in Madrid, where more than 100 people have died and more than 400 have been injured as a result of a series of bombs on trains. I am sure that the whole Parliament will join me in expressing our utter condemnation, our anger and our disgust at that despicable act by whatever group is responsible.

I spoke with the consul general of Spain this morning. I have expressed our anger and disgust, but also our sympathy and our condolences for the victims, for their families and for the people of Spain, who have managed in 30 years to go from fascism to democracy and who do not deserve that kind of mindless terrorism. [*Applause.*]

Mr Swinney: I associate the Scottish National Party unreservedly with the comments made by the First Minister in relation to the incidents in Madrid this morning, and I express our sympathy with the people of Spain and the families of those who have been killed or injured in that atrocity.

Given that the First Minister will appoint the chairman of the forthcoming review of local government finance, that he will appoint the members of that review and that he will establish its remit, is it not the case that the First Minister's remarks on Friday, dismissing out of hand the concept of a local income tax, have prejudiced that independent review before it has even started?

The First Minister: I am sad that Mr Swinney does not enjoy robust political debate. I am happy

to have that debate on systems of local government finance. I am also happy to criticise what I think are badly thought-out proposals, not because they are an alternative system but because I do not believe that the calculations have been done properly or that they take full account of the costs. I think that the proposals are flawed in an attempt to be populist, and I hope that they have failed.

Mr Swinney: The First Minister knows from our long experience of debating together that I, too, am all for robust debate. However, the First Minister told me a fortnight ago in the Parliament:

"If an independent review of local government finance is established, I have a duty as First Minister not to prejudice its outcome and I have no intention of doing so."—[*Official Report*, 26 February 2004; c 6079.]

I had asked the First Minister to express his view on the council tax—the system that he supports—and on whether he would argue for that system in the review of local government finance. He told me that he was not in a position to argue for that, because he could not prejudice the outcome of the review. On Friday, when we announced our proposals for a local income tax, the First Minister and his ministers were falling over themselves to rubbish the proposals that we made and to undermine the commitment that the First Minister made to the Parliament not to prejudice the review.

Will the First Minister tell us who will chair the review of local government finance, what its remit will be, and when it will start, in order to guarantee to the Parliament that the review will be truly independent and not just another political fix?

The First Minister: I am awful sorry that I upset Mr Swinney so much. However, to publish proposals that are portrayed as an alternative system of local government finance, but which do not take into account the increase in water charges that would result from the transfer of administration to Scottish Water, and which do not take into account properly the current situation with council tax benefit, was a deeply flawed response to the debate on local government finance systems.

I have made clear previously in the chamber, and I make it clear again today, my personal view that there is a role for property taxation in any democracy that wants progressive taxation systems. That view is not shared by all parties in the chamber, but it is, I hope, a view that is honestly expressed. Mr Swinney's party published proposals last Friday that do not stand the test of scrutiny. I am disappointed that Mr Swinney does not even want them to be subject to robust debate.

Mr Swinney: In the answers that he has just given to the Parliament, the First Minister has

neatly contradicted himself. He told me a fortnight ago that he could not comment on the council tax because he would prejudice the review. He has just argued for the council tax, which undermines what he said a fortnight ago. He says that he cannot comment on other schemes because to do so would prejudice the review. Is it not the case that we now know that the independent review of local government finance will not be an independent process? The First Minister cannot tell us who will be on the review or when it will start. The review has been in the making for more than 10 months and its outcome has been prejudged. Is it not the case that the review is not independent? It is simply a political fix to allow the Liberal Democrats to dump their principles and Labour to dump the agenda of fairness in Scotland.

The First Minister: Dear, oh dear. There will be an independent review of local government finance. It will take place within the four years of this parliamentary session. It is right that that should be the case. The review will be established properly, with an independent chair and a proper remit.

Mr Swinney: When?

The First Minister: When the Executive is ready.

The independent review will not be prejudged. It will consider all the systems on offer. I look forward to the debate that will take place around its discussions.

Cabinet (Meetings)

2. David McLetchie (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con): I echo the sympathies and condolences that have been expressed by the First Minister and Mr Swinney about the terrorist outrages in Madrid. I thank the First Minister for the communication that he has sent, through the consul general, to the Government and the people of Spain. It is entirely appropriate.

To ask the First Minister what issues will be discussed at the next meeting of the Scottish Executive's Cabinet. (S2F-719)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): The next meeting of Cabinet will discuss our progress towards implementing the partnership agreement.

David McLetchie: I hope that the Cabinet will discuss the current industrial action affecting nursery schools. Does the First Minister agree that parents of children in our nursery and special schools will be bemused that, while local pay settlements have been reached in Aberdeen, East Renfrewshire, Falkirk, Highland and five other councils, there is an on-going strike elsewhere, which is disrupting the care and education of

thousands of children throughout Scotland? Does he further agree that, if settlements that are satisfactory to councils and their nursery nurse employees can be reached in nine council areas, there is no reason why they cannot be reached elsewhere? Will the First Minister confirm that the Scottish Executive will not intervene to impose a national deal, which would undermine the settlements that have already been reached?

The First Minister: I have said previously in the chamber at First Minister's question time, and ministers have said in the chamber on other occasions, that we believe that the resolution to the dispute lies between the employers and the nursery nurses. The Executive believes strongly that nursery nurses in Scotland deserve better pay and that they do an excellent job. It believes, however, that it is for employers and trade unions to negotiate a proper settlement and for the nursery nurses to receive the pay settlement that is agreed. That should be the case. The Executive again urges those who are responsible to negotiate round the table and to ensure that there is a resolution to the dispute as quickly as possible.

David McLetchie: I agree with the First Minister that it is important that, for the sake of the children and families who are caught up in the crossfire of the dispute, councils and nursery nurses and their representatives reach agreement as soon as possible.

Does the First Minister accept that undermining the principle of local pay bargaining by imposing a national deal would be not only wrong in principle, but unfair to tens of thousands of other council employees, such as classroom assistants, auxiliaries and secretaries, whose pay is negotiated in the same manner?

The First Minister: The arrangements between local authorities in Scotland and their employees, who are represented by the trade unions, are a matter for those local authorities and trade unions. It would be entirely wrong for the Scottish Executive to seek at this stage to impose on nursery nurses, on any other group, or on local authorities, an alternative method of determining pay settlements. That is at the core of the issue. The local authorities and the unions that represent the nursery nurses need to negotiate a settlement that is fair to the nursery nurses and within their agreed procedures.

The Presiding Officer: Mr McLetchie may ask a quick third question.

David McLetchie: The First Minister said that to impose alternative methods would be inappropriate "at this stage". Does that mean that he envisages that there could be a stage at which the Executive would intervene in the on-going negotiations?

The First Minister: No, not in this instance, but I did not want to rule out for ever any possibility that we would intervene in any dispute in Scotland, for public safety reasons or any other reasons. There has been one example in the life of the Parliament in which such a threat was made by the Executive—that was in the negotiations around teachers' pay in 2000, when we said clearly that if the negotiations could not reach an appropriate settlement, we would be forced to legislate to impose one.

The Presiding Officer: There is one immediate constituency issue.

Michael McMahon (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab): I know that the First Minister is aware of the statements that were made yesterday by divisional commander Tom Buchan of N division of Strathclyde police, but is he aware of the comments of community police officers and other senior officers in N division on the need for additional powers to tackle antisocial behaviour? In particular, is he aware of the comments of former superintendent John McKelvie of ND division, which covers Bellshill? He said that, in 30 years as a police officer, he often felt that he had a screwdriver to deal with the issue and that he would much rather have had a toolbox, which is what the Antisocial Behaviour etc (Scotland) Bill will give police officers.

The First Minister: Yesterday's comments by the named police officer, who is also responsible for policing in my constituency, which is an important part of Scotland, were regrettable, and I think that he is wrong. It is vital that the police in that area, as well as in other parts of Scotland, reinforce confidence in their actions in local communities. The best way to do that is to deal with antisocial behaviour rather than to stand against the powers that local people want him and his officers to have.

Shona Robison (Dundee East) (SNP): Will the First Minister condemn the actions of Dundee City Council's Labour and Lib Dem Administration, which, in its comments to parents of children with special needs, encouraged them to go to the press to criticise nursery nurses who are in dispute? Does the First Minister believe that such action will lead to the dispute being cut short, or does he believe, as I do, that it will prolong the dispute and make it last longer than it needs to?

The First Minister: I have no intention of inflaming a dispute that has already gone on for far too long by commenting on either an individual council or the actions of the trade unions that are involved, although I think that the trade unions and the local authorities need to realise that there are parents and children out there who deserve the best possible quality of service. I have no intention of commenting on Dundee City Council and

anything that it might have said, on any Unison branch and anything that it might have said, or, for that matter, on SNP local authorities, who are reaching local settlements outwith the demands of the union for a national settlement.

The Presiding Officer: I remind members that this slot is for back benchers, in particular, to raise matters of an immediate constituency interest, and that it should be so used.

Genetically Modified Maize

3. Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): To ask the First Minister whether the Scottish Executive has approved the commercial planting of genetically modified maize in Scotland. (S2F-731)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): The commercial planting of GM maize in Scotland is not simply a matter for the Scottish Executive. Part C consent for the release of a genetically modified organism is a collective decision of European Union member states, which is based on an assessment of the risk to human health and the environment. Chardon LL received that consent six years ago.

However, Scots are uneasy about GM crops and there is little support for their early commercialisation, so we will take action to protect the interests of Scottish consumers and to ensure consumer choice. We believe that a statutory co-existence measure should exist to prevent cross-contamination. Compensation that is funded by the GM industry will be provided for any cross-contamination that occurs in Scotland. In areas where GM maize could be grown, we wish to establish GM-free zones.

Robin Harper: Does the First Minister agree that all that could be preparing the ground for GM crops? Everyone in Scotland knows that the Labour-Lib GM Executive has caved in to Westminster and that it has consented in principle to GM maize commercialisation throughout the United Kingdom. Is the Executive engaged in a public sedation exercise, by introducing a set of measures that is based on a dubious co-existence proposition and unworkable voluntary GM-free zones, to prepare the ground for GM commercialisation in Scotland?

The First Minister: No. The proof is in the statement that I just made. Chardon LL has received European Union approval and the scientific evidence shows not only that it does not harm the environment, but that it improves biodiversity rather than adversely affecting it. We have taken the appropriate steps with our decisions to ensure that our regime is robust and can protect Scottish consumers.

A statutory co-existence regime will be created and a regime will be established for penalising GM

companies should any cross-contamination occur. If we can work closely with farmers in the relevant areas, there will be voluntary GM-free zones so that Scottish consumers who are not at all convinced about the products are protected. Consumers will be able to make the choices that they want to make when the new labelling regime that we have been at the forefront of advocating is adopted in April.

Robin Harper: Does the First Minister recognise that half the Parliament remains sceptical, that the Lib Dems should be uncomfortable, that the Westminster Environmental Audit Committee thinks that his decision is irresponsible and that the public do not want GM? Does he reject or support the seeking of an independent legal opinion on whether he has fully used the powers that are available to him?

The First Minister: We are always careful to ensure that we have legal opinions on the decisions that we take. My response to Robin Harper is that I believe that almost all members of the Parliament are sceptical about GM crops. I am sceptical about GM crops. That scepticism is why we insisted on putting in place the regime that I described, why we take the precautionary approach and why we ensured that the two crops that showed harm to the environment were rejected.

We will continue to take that sceptical stance not only in our debates and decisions in Scotland, but in our discussions at the UK level, in which we will push that case, and at the European level, where the decisions that led to today's position were made—some of those decisions were made back in 1990.

Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD): Does the First Minister agree that every attempt by a member state or devolved Administration to impose a blanket ban on GM has been unsuccessful? Does he agree that, faced with the same scientific evidence and advice, it is not surprising that the Scottish Executive and the other devolved Administrations reached the same conclusion as the UK Parliament did? Does he further agree that through action here and supportive action in Europe we should prioritise measures to ensure and protect consumers' ability to make an informed choice?

The First Minister: Of course I agree with that. I emphasise that when the UK Government and the Scottish Executive reach a consistent position, it is not always the UK Government that has persuaded the Executive of its position. More often than not, the situation is the other way round. In this case, we were clear about our position. We wanted to ensure that a clear precautionary principle was at the heart of our decisions and that, despite the scientific evidence and the legal

position, as restrictive a regime as possible was put in place to protect Scottish consumers. Not only did we achieve that in Scotland, but we persuaded the UK Government to introduce the same regime across the Scottish-English border. We should be congratulated on that, not castigated.

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

I will give the First Minister a further opportunity to answer the question that has been asked repeatedly over the past couple of days. Will he confirm that the agreement on GM maize was a collective decision by Westminster and the devolved authorities? Is it not the case that if the Scottish Executive had said no, it would be talking today not about so-called voluntary agreements but about a total ban on the commercialisation of GM maize in Scotland—yes or no?

The First Minister: The decision to approve Chardon LL maize was taken six years ago at European level. That is the context within which we are operating. As I explained to Nora Radcliffe—I will try to explain again—we managed to convince our colleagues in the UK Government to take the line that was announced this week. The arrangement that has been announced is the most restrictive that we could have put in place. We made that decision because we understand that people in Scotland are sceptical about GM crops. However, we are not prepared to defy completely the science, the evidence, or the law as it applies in Scotland and elsewhere in Europe.

Racially Motivated Attacks

4. Bill Butler (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab): To ask the First Minister what action can be taken to help reduce the number of racially motivated attacks in disadvantaged communities, particularly against refugees and asylum seekers. (S2F-722)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): As all of us have made clear in the chamber on a number of occasions, Scotland is not prepared to tolerate racist attacks or harassment. To tackle those who might carry out such attacks, we need to encourage cultural and behavioural change and to support the increased efforts of Scottish police forces to respond effectively to attacks when they occur.

Bill Butler: I am sure that we all support tough action against all those who are convicted of carrying out racially motivated attacks and harassment.

The First Minister will be aware of a deeply disturbing report that was published earlier this week by Positive Action in Housing, which revealed a rise of 75 per cent in the number of complaints about racial harassment in the year to the end of March 2004. That harassment is carried

out by a despicable minority, but their actions can be devastating. Does the First Minister agree that there are some excellent examples in Glasgow from which we can learn of community policing and joint working with other agencies, including Glasgow City Council, to create the inclusive communities that we all seek, in which asylum seekers and refugees can all be made welcome?

The First Minister: We have supported the admirable work that has been done in recent years in Glasgow to improve community relations and to ensure that those who seek asylum and are granted refugee status in Glasgow are welcomed into the community and can make a contribution. Such people make a massive positive contribution to local schools and communities.

Key individuals have been involved in that work. I am particularly delighted by the discovery that I made on Monday night at the Scottish Police College at Tulliallan. The police officer who was at the heart of the rebuilding of the community at Sighthill in Glasgow, and who was responsible for the community festival that I attended two years ago, is giving training to police recruits and other police officers from throughout Scotland to ensure that they learn positive lessons from that experience. That is the right way for the Scottish police forces to respond and we should support their efforts.

Miss Annabel Goldie (West of Scotland) (Con): Everyone agrees that racist attacks are a particularly repugnant form of criminal activity. The First Minister referred to our Scottish police forces. Is he satisfied that there are enough community policemen on the ground to deter such vile activity? It is not disputed that at any one time only 140 police officers are in our communities, on the streets. Is the First Minister satisfied that that is an adequate safeguard?

The First Minister: The member cites a silly statistic that we have debated in the chamber in the past. In reality, there are now significantly more police officers on the street in Scotland than was the case last year or the year before that, and there will continue to be more because of the reforms that we are pursuing.

I note the Conservative party's opposition to some of the reforms that are proposed for our courts and I hope that it will review its position. We want to see police officers on the beat carrying out the duties that they signed up to carry out, instead of wasting time sitting in courtrooms dealing with cases that have been delayed unnecessarily.

Budget

5. Shona Robison (Dundee East) (SNP): To ask the First Minister how the Scottish Executive intends to respond to the issues raised in the

report by Professor Arthur Midwinter and the Scottish Parliament information centre, "Key Trends in the Scottish Budget 1999-2003". (S2F-713)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): Professor Midwinter says that his report is

"a background paper with limited information at the beginning of a comprehensive budget review exercise rather than a fully developed assessment of recent performance".

However, I found his report very interesting.

Shona Robison: So did I.

Did the First Minister note Professor Midwinter's comments on health? Is the First Minister satisfied with the Scottish Executive's stewardship of the NHS when, according to Professor Midwinter, the NHS received 15 per cent extra funding between 1999 and 2003, yet it gained only a 5.3 per cent increase in staffing? Does the First Minister believe that that represents good value for money, given that we have more people waiting for treatment and fewer people being treated in the NHS and that we therefore desperately require more staff to tackle those problems?

The First Minister: That is the third different position that the SNP has taken on the subject in the past week.

Consistently during the past year, we have heard perfectly understandable calls from the Scottish nationalist party for increased wages in the national health service for nurses, doctors, consultants, allied health professionals and everybody who works in the health service. Then we heard from Fergus Ewing last Sunday, after the publication of Professor Midwinter's report, that the SNP's finance spokesperson thinks that the way in which the Executive puts together its budget, together with a point that Professor Midwinter made about increased wage costs in the public sector in Scotland, shows that we are spending money on the wrong things. The SNP's finance spokesperson does not agree with the calls for increased wages.

Today, we hear from the health spokesperson that we should not be spending in the way that we are in the health service. The situation is getting absolutely ridiculous. I do not mind if the SNP calls consistently for increased spending and justifies that by advocating increased taxes. However, doing that at the same time as calling for increased spending and lower taxes—or saying, as the finance spokesperson did, that he is in favour of cutting public sector budgets rather than using the tax-and-spend approach, as detailed in *Holyrood* magazine yesterday—throws the whole SNP policy into tatters. The SNP needs to review its policy.

Jim Mather (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): Will the First Minister consider augmenting future versions of Professor Midwinter's report by adding comprehensive reporting of outcomes for all public functions—for example, clear statements of measurable and tangible public good that has been achieved from Government spending, as suggested by Nicholas Crafts of the London School of Economics in his exceedingly well-received lecture this week?

The First Minister: I am keen that we are not only clear about what we want to spend money on, but that we measure how effective that spending is and we will continue to do that.

Higher Education (Review)

6. Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Executive's response is to the phase 3 report of its review of higher education. (S2F-723)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): We are currently considering the report and intend to publish our initial response shortly.

Murdo Fraser: The First Minister said in reply to a question about the publication of the review:

"we will act quickly thereafter to outline our plans for the years ahead".—[*Official Report*, 15 January 2004; c 4875.]

We look forward to that with interest.

If I were a school pupil today, looking at my university options, should I be worried about the prospect of paying a higher fee, tax contribution or endowment at a Scottish university? Or will the First Minister take this opportunity to rule out any such increases?

The First Minister: We have already ruled out fees and we are now looking at the conclusions of the phase 3 report so that we make the right decisions to ensure that such a student will have as high quality a university education in Scotland as they would have anywhere else in the UK.

Points of Order

12:29

Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. The scheduling of two half-hour and two 45-minute debates this morning had the intended effect of excluding back benchers.

The Scottish Socialist Party, in particular, has repeatedly abused the Parliament's procedures by salami-slicing the time that is allocated to it. That is disrespectful to back-bench members of larger parties. I am grateful that ministers gave up part of their time to allow some members an opportunity to speak in today's debates, but it is unacceptable that debating time should be split into fragments. Such a structure infringes the rights of members who should have an equal right to speak and truncates the debate in a way that I believe risks bringing the Parliament into disrepute.

You are the custodian of the rights of members and the Parliament's procedures. Will you advise members whether an amendment to the Parliament's standing orders is needed, to prevent a recurrence of the practice? What is the procedure for taking forward such an amendment?

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): The scheduling, as you called it, of this morning's debates was of course decided by the Parliament on a business motion.

Perhaps I can go a little deeper into some of the issues. The standing orders set out the number of half days that are to be set aside each year for non-Executive business. That is clear. Those half days are then divided up in relation to the proportion of seats that each party in the Parliament holds. That process resulted in a half day of business being shared by the Scottish Senior Citizens Unity Party and the Scottish Socialist Party; how those parties used their allotted time was entirely a matter for them.

Of course, I recognise the effect that short debates have on the ability of members from all parties to contribute, but the use of non-Executive time in that way is not a matter for me. It is of course open to you, Mr McNulty, or to any other member, to approach the Procedures Committee about that matter or any other matter of procedure.

Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP): Further to that point of order, Presiding Officer. As you consider Des McNulty's comments, will you reflect on the fact that for members deliberately to mislead the Parliament brings the Parliament into disrepute? Mr McNulty said that the SSP has repeatedly salami-sliced debates. Will you confirm that the SSP has had only two debates in this

session of the Parliament and that this is the first time that the available time has been so restricted? If Mr McNulty is referring to the first session of Parliament, only once in four years did what he describes actually take place.

The Presiding Officer: I have nothing further to add to the considered statement that I have just given.

Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I do not seek to challenge the chair—

The Presiding Officer: Good.

Margo MacDonald: Well, not today.

However, in relation to the rules in standing orders on your right to select questions, I would welcome guidance on the criteria that apply. Although I understand why you would want to give full range to all the members who have lodged questions for the First Minister, it seems to me that you must make a judgment about the seriousness of the different questions that are lodged. Today, Bill Butler's question referred to an issue that I do not think can be separated from events in Glasgow, where three Kurdish men are nearing death. I suggest that the number of members who wanted to ask a supplementary question to that question indicated the urgency of that situation and that you might have accorded time more generously for those questions.

The Presiding Officer: I apply my judgement as best I can and I have to work with the material that comes back from the floor of the chamber.

12:33

Meeting suspended until 14:00.

14:00

On resuming—

Question Time

SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): Good afternoon. We now begin our new, extended question time, starting with questions on enterprise, transport and lifelong learning.

A80 (Upgrade)

1. Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive whether, following the Minister for Transport's recent visit, there will be a public inquiry into the proposals for the upgrade of the A80. (S2O-1478)

The Minister for Transport (Nicol Stephen): No decision has yet been taken, but it would be unusual for a scheme of this scale and importance to proceed without a public local inquiry.

Donald Gorrie: The minister's statement is welcome, as was his visit. I am sure that the local people will appreciate the time and interest that he has shown. Would he agree that, particularly in this case, in which there are strong feelings about the two alternative routes for the road—there are strong arguments for and against in each case—a proper inquiry at which all the arguments may be tested would be the best way forward?

Nicol Stephen: If an objector wishes to put forward, and justify, any alternative route, the reporter, assuming that there is an inquiry—as I have said, a decision on that has yet to be taken formally—would be duty-bound to consider it and report back to me as Minister for Transport. We are now some way through the consultation on the first phase of development. There will be three phases of development under the terms of the current proposals. The detailed proposals for stages 2 and 3 will be published later this year. In my view, if a public local inquiry were required, it would be sensible to hold it in relation to the three phases of the scheme.

Cathie Craigie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab): I welcome the minister's response. He will be aware that there has been uncertainty surrounding the A80 in my constituency for 30 years. I do not suppose that he will have had personal experience of that for many of those years, but the people of Cumbernauld and Kilsyth have been suffering chronic congestion daily. Will

he do everything in his power to ensure that the road orders for the next phases of development are published as soon as possible, and that a public local inquiry will examine the three phases along the stretch of the road between Stepps and Hags?

Nicol Stephen: I am very pleased that work at the Auchenkilns roundabout is now under way. We are spending more than £20 million on introducing a grade-separated junction there, which will improve the situation. However, I believe that the full scheme is required—virtually everyone in the community recognises that some change is urgently required.

I have not had to suffer the daily inconvenience and disruption that are caused by the congestion on the A80. However, I have sat in traffic there for two hours on a journey from Aberdeen to Glasgow, and I know of some of the serious congestion that has occurred in recent weeks, so I realise how topical the subject is. That is why I am very pleased that we are committed to the scheme, that funding has been set aside for it and that we will be investing tens of millions of pounds over the coming years in making a very major improvement.

Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP): Has the minister ruled out a general public inquiry? If so, will any public inquiry be a local public inquiry? How wide would a local public inquiry's remit be?

Nicol Stephen: The inquiry will be a public local inquiry. I hesitate to describe, off the cuff and in the Parliament, the remit of that public local inquiry, but it will be the normal public local inquiry permitted, to which the normal procedure for major trunk road schemes applies. I give Alex Neil the assurance that I gave Donald Gorrie: any objector has the opportunity to put forward the case for any alternative proposal.

Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con): Will the minister confirm that any inquiry will include a full appraisal of both the costs and the benefits of the A80 upgrade and of the Kelvin valley route for the new motorway? Will it include a comparison between the economic and environmental impacts of both options?

Nicol Stephen: The costs and benefits of the proposals will be part of the evidence that is put in front of the public local inquiry—that is only appropriate. I have visited the alternative route and looked at the proposals in that regard, but I should make it clear that the evidence that the Scottish Executive brings forward will be in relation to the scheme that it favours. That is normal; it would be extremely unusual for the Scottish Executive to come forward with multiple proposals or to give evidence on a multiplicity of schemes.

Higher Education (Investment)

2. Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what role maintaining competitive levels of investment in the higher education sector has in delivering the smart, successful Scotland economic policy in the short to medium term. (S2O-1447)

The Deputy First Minister and Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Mr Jim Wallace): A thriving higher education sector is a key part of our vision for a smart, successful Scotland. The Scottish Executive is committed to maintaining the competitiveness of our higher education sector in national and international terms.

Fiona Hyslop: Perhaps the minister will tell us at some point what that means in pounds, shillings and pence. Will he acknowledge that, in the most recent spending review in 2002, the rate of investment in higher education in England was substantially higher than the rate here in Scotland? Regardless of the Westminster Parliament's decision on top-up fees in the future, does he recognise that we have a strong case to argue for more competitive investment in higher education here and now, as part of his economic policy for a smart, successful Scotland?

Mr Wallace: I remind Fiona Hyslop that the Executive parties decimalised in 1971, so I assure her that when I give the answer, it will be in pounds and pence rather than in pounds, shillings and pence. Her comment proves that the SNP is still stuck somewhere in—[*Laughter.*]

It is important to put it on the record that, as part of the current spending review, funding and investment in higher education in Scotland will go up by some 6.9 per cent in real terms, over and above the rate of inflation. The Executive has made a commitment to higher education during the period for which we have had responsibility. A lot of economic development is dependent on research, and we will increase funding for research by 20 per cent in real terms by 2005-06. Within that, the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council's knowledge transfer budget, which is used to expand commercialisation of research, will be doubled to at least £12 million by 2005-06. There can be no doubt about the Executive's commitment to maintaining Scotland's competitive advantage in higher education.

Congestion

3. Ms Wendy Alexander (Paisley North) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what steps it is taking to reduce congestion on Scotland's motorway and trunk road network. (S2O-1548)

The Minister for Transport (Nicol Stephen): We aim to reduce congestion on Scotland's

motorways and trunk roads by making major investment in a range of public transport alternatives, by tackling key congestion points on the network, and by encouraging a shift in people's travel choices.

Ms Alexander: Will the minister tell us what the Executive's policy is on the proposals to introduce congestion charging in the city of Edinburgh? Is the Executive considering congestion charging as a way to finance further road network development in Scotland?

Nicol Stephen: The answer to the second point is no, we are not. On the first point, the Transport (Scotland) Act 2001 enables local authorities to come forward with road-user charging schemes. That act was passed by this Parliament and was widely supported. I have a role in the proposals that are being brought forward by the City of Edinburgh Council; if those proposals are submitted to the Scottish Executive, it will be for me as Minister for Transport to approve that charging scheme, to approve it with amendment, or to reject it. It would therefore be inappropriate for me to comment on it at this stage. The Executive supports the ability of local authorities to come to their own local decisions on road-user charging schemes and to bring them to the Executive in due course if they believe that they are appropriate.

Chris Ballance (South of Scotland) (Green): The trends on the graphs for road traffic use, for journey times in cities and for congestion are all continuing to rise—if anything, they are rising slightly faster than previously. When does the minister expect that rise to end?

Nicol Stephen: The trend is worrying. It is not a Scottish trend or a United Kingdom trend but an international trend. There is growing congestion, particularly in areas of economic expansion.

It is important that we invest not only in the sort of public transport alternatives that I have spoken about, but in our road network. We must ensure that our roads are properly maintained and that specific congestion hotspots and pinch-points are tackled. That is why our roads budget will be maintained.

As Chris Ballance knows, we are expanding our investment in public transport. That investment will increase by 70 per cent over the period to 2006. However, it would be wrong of any minister to anticipate the day on which we start to achieve progress with the level of congestion turning around. We have a long-term objective of reducing the level of road traffic to the 2001 level by 2021. That is why I am determined to do all that I can to ensure that we maintain our investment in public transport, introduce quality alternatives to using the car and encourage more people to leave the

car at home and make use of our trams, buses and rail connections.

Bottled Water Industry

4. Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive what support it gives to the development of the bottled spring water industry. (S2O-1434)

The Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Lewis Macdonald): As in other industrial sectors, companies that operate in the bottled spring water sector can access a range of business support from the enterprise networks. That support includes helping suppliers to access new markets, develop new products and improve efficiency in production and distribution, as well as encouraging collaboration, the sharing of best practice and effective networking.

Murdo Fraser: The minister will be aware of the economic contribution that is made by companies such as Highland Spring Ltd, in Blackford, Perthshire, and the Strathmore Mineral Water Company Ltd, in Forfar, which produces the wonderful water that we drink in the chamber. Can he tell us why he allows a situation to persist in which Scottish spring water producers are assessed for business rates on their boreholes, whereas bottled spring water producers in England are not? What is he going to do to address that competitive disadvantage for Scottish spring water producers?

Lewis Macdonald: We want to ensure that there is no competitive disadvantage, which is why we maintain under regular review the basis on which such things are assessed. Mr Fraser will be aware that we have taken significant steps forward on business rates in Scotland over the past 12 months, and we will continue to address those issues.

Roseanna Cunningham (Perth) (SNP): Highland Spring Ltd is based in my constituency. It is a big employer, and the industry as a whole employs a huge number of people throughout Scotland. Can the minister say what specific steps he and the Executive are taking to support Highland Spring Ltd in its current campaign against the misleading selling of Dasani water? Dasani is labelled in a way that allows people to believe that it is something that it is not, whereas it should be labelled "Not the real thing". Are there specific steps that he can take to support that campaign?

Lewis Macdonald: Roseanna Cunningham will appreciate that the responsibility for such matters lies with the Food Standards Agency. Although there is no legislation relating specifically to the use of the term "pure"—which term is a matter of controversy in this case—there is clear guidance

from the Food Standards Agency that the term "pure" should be used only to describe a food product to which nothing has been added. In the case that she mentioned, it is clear that minerals have been added to the water. The Food Standards Agency has raised the matter with the relevant local authority in whose area the producers of Dasani are based, and it is currently investigating the matter. Any decision about whether the law has been broken will, ultimately, be for the courts to make.

Marine Energy (Employment)

5. Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive what action it is taking to ensure the maximum employment potential from wave and tidal power. (S2O-1507)

The Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Lewis Macdonald): The forum for renewable energy development in Scotland—FREDS—last year set up a sub-group to prepare an action plan for the development of the marine energy industry. I expect the marine energy group to report to the next meeting of FREDS in Aberdeen in May.

Mr Stone: The minister will be aware that the Pentland firth, between Orkney and my constituency, has been described as a future Saudi Arabia because of the amount of energy that can be produced there from tidal power. As he will also be aware, a scheme is being worked up there by the Robert Gordon University and others. First, will he assure me that he will take a close look at what is proposed in the Pentland firth? Secondly, will he assure me that the Executive will consider that as a model for similar schemes in other parts of Scotland where there are equally strong tidal races?

Lewis Macdonald: I look forward to Jamie Stone reporting Saudi Arabian levels of income for the people of Caithness, Sutherland and, on the other side of the firth, the Orkney Islands. I hope that that will be one of the consequences of developing this industry.

To ensure that we maximise the returns from marine energy, we will continue not only to provide the current level of support but to build on that support. We recognise that tidal energy is potentially one of Scotland's greatest resources. Indeed, because, unlike some other forms of energy, one can predict tidal streams thousands of years in advance, tidal energy will increase security of supply from renewable sources.

However, tidal energy has not yet reached the point at which it can be developed commercially, which is why we have invested more than £2 million in the European Marine Energy Centre in

Orkney and why we will encourage the industry to develop the new technology in this country. After all, we want to capture the jobs and business benefits as well as the environmental benefits of developing marine energy.

Sarah Boyack (Edinburgh Central) (Lab): I welcome the minister's positive response. I should also say that the developments in Orkney and the work at the Robert Gordon University are also very welcome. We need long-term funding to allow the technology to be developed and its potential to be maximised.

After attending this week's launch in Edinburgh of the Pelamis, which is a wonderful technological development, I am aware that, with all the developments in wind power and the massive potential of wave and tidal power, the issue of upgrading the grid will be critical. Will the minister commit himself to securing a positive response in negotiations with the UK Government on that matter?

Lewis Macdonald: Sarah Boyack has raised two very important issues. Members will recall that, when we passed the Sewel motion on the Energy Bill, which is UK legislation, a couple of weeks ago, we permitted the doubling of Scottish ministers' budget for promoting renewable energy. However, the Department of Trade and Industry will continue to provide much of the capital funding for this matter.

Sarah Boyack was also right to raise the issue of upgrading the grid. If we are to connect the electricity produced in the more remote parts of Scotland to the national grid, it will need to be upgraded. We will continue to work with the grid's operators and the UK Government to ensure that that happens.

Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): Will the minister confirm that, in discussions with the Great Britain transmission issues working group, he is making the case for a level of public investment in the interconnectors and the grid to create jobs that is the same as the investment that previous Governments made in the development of nuclear power?

Lewis Macdonald: We are seeking to work with our industry partners to ensure that they recognise both the need for their investment and the benefits that could come from it. We and the UK Government will work in partnership with the industry to deliver that. The key point is that we have a grid that allows the maximum output of renewable energy from around Scotland.

Borders Railway

6. Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it has considered the business case for the Borders

railway and whether it will now fund the line. (S2O-1497)

The Minister for Transport (Nicol Stephen): The Executive is currently considering the business case and we are now assessing further information that we recently received from the Waverley railway partnership.

Christine Grahame: Is the minister aware that since 1998 more than 4,700 jobs have been lost in the Scottish Borders, that 35 per cent of the remaining 41,000 jobs are part-time and that the average weekly wage in the Borders is £80 less than the average weekly wage in the rest of Scotland?

In light of those facts, does the minister agree with Scottish Enterprise Borders that a modern public transport network, including the railway, is crucial to the Borders economy? On that basis, will he confirm that he will look beyond the Scottish transport appraisal group guidelines—which, from a previous reply, appear to be the only test in this respect—and fund the line on the wider and crucial economic case?

Nicol Stephen: The STAG appraisal is a very important part not only of any rail project but of any public transport project. Indeed, it is an important part of all transport projects—after all, it should also be applied to roads projects in Scotland. As a result, it is vital that ministers consider that important appraisal in order to make a robust case.

That said, the Executive is committed to progressing the Borders rail project, which received clear support in our partnership agreement. On that point, I should say that however much Christine Grahame might refer to a Scottish Enterprise Borders document, the project rates no mention in the SNP manifesto, which also contains absolutely no commitment to funding it.

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): It is important that the project gets up and running.

It has been claimed this week in the newspapers that Ms Grahame's telephone calls are being spied on, but not even the security services would be able to find a reference in the SNP manifesto to the Borders railway.

Nicol Stephen: I am curious to know who might spend their time tapping Christine Grahame's phone line. Perhaps we should leave the matter there until the Minister for Justice and the Lord Advocate start answering questions.

Justice and Law Officers

Trials in Absence of Accused

1. Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive whether, following the stage 1 debate on the Criminal Procedure (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill, it will reconsider plans to conduct trials when the accused is absent. (S2O-1485)

The Deputy Minister for Justice (Hugh Henry): We have listened to the Justice 1 Committee's concerns and we note the committee's opposition to an accused being tried in their absence from the outset. We are aware that amendments may be lodged on that at stage 2 and we will reflect on such amendments.

Mike Rumbles: I thank the minister for that reply. Will he consider lodging Executive amendments to deal with that particular topic?

Hugh Henry: The deadline for Executive amendments has passed, so we do not have that opportunity. However, I am aware that at least one amendment on that topic has been lodged and there may be more. We take seriously the points that the Justice 1 Committee made. We also note that the committee said that it would at least consider the possibility of trials being held in the absence of the accused where all the evidence has been led. We share the committee's view that far too many trials are abandoned because someone absconds, which affects far too many people, such as witnesses, who can suffer trauma and turmoil.

Justice is denied when an accused absconds. We believe that abandoned trials go against everything that we are trying to do to ensure that justice in Scotland is seen to be working effectively for everyone. We are committed to a safer and stronger Scotland. As part of that, we need a court system that works for everyone concerned and which ensures that victims and witnesses have a sense of commitment and achievement from the justice system and that they do not feel that it is balanced the other way.

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab): Does the minister agree that there should be tough measures in our criminal justice system for those who fail to appear for their trials? Does he also agree that the current proposal to try an accused in their absence was not supported by the evidence that the Justice 1 Committee heard? When he considers the committee's position—the committee rejected the notion that an accused should be tried in their absence—and its suggestion that the trial in absence procedure could be used when all the evidence has been led before a jury, will he also consider our report, in which we suggest that we should consider closely

why some accused persons fail to appear for their trial?

Hugh Henry: Yes, we will certainly consider that. We must try to find out why some accused persons fail to appear for trial. The more information we have, the more that can inform current decisions and future ones. I believe that, across the Parliament, we are all committed—from the committee's discussions, I know that it is committed—to seeing the improvements that have been mentioned take effect. It is wrong that one or two people, having made a perverse decision that is often an attempt to deny justice, can have such a devastating and costly effect not only on the court system, but on the wider community.

Off-licences

2. Bill Butler (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive whether, as part of action on antisocial behaviour, it will implement more effective controls over off-licences that sell alcohol to under-age young people. (S2O-1455)

The Minister for Justice (Cathy Jamieson): We absolutely condemn the sale of alcohol to under-age young people and are determined to tackle the irresponsible retailers who allow that to happen. I have already announced our proposal that off-sales should be required to operate a no-proof, no-sale policy as a condition of holding a premises licence.

Bill Butler: I am grateful to the minister for her response and I am glad to hear—as I am sure we all are—that she is committed to taking action against the minority of irresponsible licensees who sell alcohol to under-age young people. Will she say what measures the Executive intends to introduce to empower individuals and community organisations by giving them a greater say in the regulation of off-sales in their communities?

Cathy Jamieson: As Bill Butler rightly reminds us, only a minority of retailers would act in an irresponsible way. The issue is important, both for the health of our young people and for community safety and public order. That is why my proposal is that the statutory guidance that we issue should include a specific requirement for off-licences. That will ensure that the local licensing board must make a proactive assessment of local provision, in consultation with the police and local communities, in advance of the introduction of the new regime.

Mrs Margaret Ewing (Moray) (SNP): I think that all of us endorse the view that has been expressed by Bill Butler and the minister, but is the minister satisfied that the current law is being used effectively to bring prosecutions? It seems to me that attempts to bring prosecutions in this area are limited. I have already lodged a written question asking for statistics.

Cathy Jamieson: I am sure that we will produce the figures that Mrs Ewing seeks in due course. It is important to recognise that, following what was outlined in the Nicholson report and the subsequent Daniels report, we are proposing a fundamental review in relation to a range of provisions. My belief is that the licensing provisions need that fundamental overhaul. It is clear that, in many areas, local communities do not feel that they are protected by the existing regime. We have only to consider the figures on young people who drink to excess and the problems of binge drinking to realise that we require not only legislative solutions, but a culture change and a change in attitudes to alcohol in Scotland.

Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab): In many communities, there is a perception that there are just too many off-licences. In the context of reviews of provision, will the Executive support local authorities in denying licences when they feel that there is over-provision in a particular locality or when there is abuse?

Cathy Jamieson: I hope that I made clear in my answer to Bill Butler our intention that the local licensing boards will be able to take account of provision in a local area, bearing in mind the Nicholson principles of public order and public safety and the impact on health. That is an indication that local licensing boards should be able to take provision into account and, indeed, should be proactive in making such an assessment.

Corporate Homicide

3. Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what steps it is taking to review the law on corporate culpable homicide. (S2O-1436)

The Minister for Justice (Cathy Jamieson): This is an issue that we take very seriously, as the loss of life in any circumstances must never be dismissed. Both the First Minister and I have said before that, if we conclude that the law on corporate homicide needs to be changed, we will bring forward proposals to do so.

Karen Gillon: I welcome the minister's comments, but it is now some four years since the deaths of the Findlay family in my constituency. Although the case that was brought by the Lord Advocate was historic—it was the first of its kind in Scotland—it did not find its way to trial. It is clear that there is a gap in the system. Will she undertake to make the necessary changes, in discussion with everyone involved, as quickly as is practical?

Cathy Jamieson: Karen Gillon is right to remind us that it is some time since the incident in

question. I understand the position of the families and those who lost loved ones in that tragic circumstance. Work is continuing on what is a complex area. In an answer to a question from Karen Gillon last month, I said that I would be more than happy to meet her but, at that stage, we concluded that it might be best if we waited until we had fully considered the judgment. I repeat that, if we require to make changes, we will do so. I am more than happy to discuss with Karen Gillon how we progress the matter, about which I will keep her fully informed.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton (Lothians) (Con): Does the minister accept that the Health and Safety Executive can make reports and recommendations that give rise to prosecutions? If she is minded to re-examine the subject, I ask her to consult the Health and Safety Executive, which has a lot of experience in the field.

Cathy Jamieson: I am well aware of the Health and Safety Executive's work across a range of areas. That work embraces not just the area under discussion but the whole field of health and safety at work. Whatever we do, we will of course consult all the relevant organisations.

Clementi Review

4. Christine May (Central Fife) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what the implications are for Scotland of the Clementi review. (S2O-1515)

The Minister for Justice (Cathy Jamieson): The review is about the regulation of the legal professions in England and Wales. Although it does not apply to Scotland, it identifies issues that are of relevance. We are keen that legal services in Scotland should be regulated in the interest of consumers and that our market should be competitive. We are commissioning research into the legal services market in Scotland. The research findings will provide an evidence base and will allow us to develop policies that address Scottish circumstances.

Christine May: I am grateful to the minister for her explanation of the scope of the review and of its potential implications.

Does the minister agree that many individuals feel that the present procedures do not give them a sufficiently simple, transparent and robust mechanism to address their legitimate grievances about poor legal practice? What steps will she take to ensure that better mechanisms are introduced to give aggrieved individuals a route by which their concerns can be addressed?

Cathy Jamieson: Christine May will be aware that, in the first session of the Parliament, the Justice 1 Committee undertook a thorough inquiry into regulation of the legal profession. A number of recommendations were made at that stage and

they are being acted on. Indeed, this week, in response to the announcement about the Clementi review, the Law Society of Scotland recognised that we have moved a considerable way forward in Scotland.

However, from the correspondence that I have received from a number of MSPs, I am aware that people are concerned to ensure that we continue to keep the area under close review and that we consider, in particular, the role of the Scottish legal services ombudsman and whether any areas need to be strengthened. I have already had some very productive discussions with the Law Society of Scotland, which I hope to continue.

Offenders (Employability)

5. Rhona Brankin (Midlothian) (Lab): *[Interruption.]* I am sorry, Presiding Officer; I failed to have my card in the slot.

First, I declare an interest, which is that I am the chair of the Scottish Library and Information Council.

To ask the Scottish Executive what steps it is taking to improve the employability of offenders. (S2O-1511)

The Deputy Minister for Justice (Hugh Henry): As well as the Scottish Prison Service, a number of voluntary organisations provide education and recognised training that aim to improve the skills of prisoners. The Scottish Prison Service is also working with employer representatives to enable prisoners who are leaving custody to access employment opportunities.

Rhona Brankin: Does the minister agree that, as many offenders have not benefited hugely from school education, opportunities for lifelong learning are absolutely central to improving employability? Does he further agree that prison libraries play a vital role in delivering lifelong learning and so to improving employability?

Hugh Henry: Very much so. The number of people from some sort of disadvantaged background who end up in prison is a tragedy, although that is not to excuse their criminality. Sometimes, during the time that they are in prison, they are not adequately or properly prepared for their release. If they do not have the proper skills or educational background, they are left at a greater disadvantage when they come out of prison.

I recognise the role that the use of libraries, reading and other such educational skills play in the development of the policy. We are equally concerned to ensure that the preparation of prisoners for release during the time that they are in prison is absolutely consistent with the support

that is given to them upon release. One of the things that we are concerned to do is to get the different parts of the system working more effectively. That is why we are consulting on the creation of a single agency.

Crime Victims

6. Scott Barrie (Dunfermline West) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what guidance is issued to procurators fiscal on keeping alleged victims of crime and, where appropriate, their families informed of the conduct and progress of cases in which they have an interest. (S2O-1472)

The Solicitor General for Scotland (Mrs Elish Angiolini): The function of the victim information and advice service, which is known as VIA and is part of the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service, is to provide victims, and in some cases their families, with information about the progress of cases in which they have an interest. VIA also provides explanatory information about the criminal justice system and details of the agencies that offer practical and emotional support, so that victims and next of kin are aware of, and can access, all the help and support that they require.

In accordance with detailed referral procedures, procurators fiscal advise VIA of those cases in which victims, or their relatives, should be offered that information. VIA's services will be available in each procurator fiscal office by the end of the year. We have also issued detailed guidance to procurators fiscal about keeping victims of crime and bereaved next of kin informed about the progress of cases that affect them. A revised version of the guidance will be issued shortly.

Scott Barrie: I thank the Solicitor General for her comprehensive response, particularly on the work of VIA.

I appreciate that fiscals and deutes have many demands placed on them and that some victims of crime perhaps have unrealistic expectations of the information that can be given to them. However, does the Solicitor General agree that victims and their families are too often left bewildered by decisions that are made in cases, particularly where bail applications are made or where reduced pleas are accepted? Will she consider a system in which, in such cases, a brief explanation is available from the fiscal to victims and families, which might assist them in understanding a complicated process?

The Solicitor General for Scotland: I agree with Mr Barrie that it is important that victims understand the process—that was the whole objective behind setting up VIA, which aims to make information accessible in what can be bewildering circumstances for victims and witnesses. Indeed, VIA's objective is to provide

bail information to victims in cases in which the service is provided within 24 hours. There has been a significant response from victims to the provision of that service.

There is an on-going review and we are attempting to give as much information as possible to victims where we can do so within our operational constraints. Sometimes, we cannot give information, but it is the organisation's objective to improve where possible victims' and witnesses' understanding. We aim to deliver that as soon as possible.

David Mundell (South of Scotland) (Con):

Does the Solicitor General agree that many issues that arise in relation to victims of crime also arise in relation to fatal accident inquiries? Will she consider extending to them a regime similar to the one she outlined in answering the previous question?

The Solicitor General for Scotland:

Indeed. The establishment of VIA closely followed a careful research project on victims' needs. At the beginning, there was a pilot in the Aberdeen office and, since then, the service has been provided to victims in fatal accident inquiries and next of kin in cases that are the subject of an investigation by the procurator fiscal. It is just as important that those who are the subject of such proceedings are kept up to date with what is happening, that they understand what is happening and that they feel part of the process. That is what we aim to deliver with the establishment of VIA.

Mr Stewart Maxwell (West of Scotland) (SNP):

Does the Solicitor General agree that, as well as keeping victims informed of the progress of cases, it is imperative that witnesses are kept informed? Does she agree that the Executive should learn lessons from the research that was carried out by the University of Wolverhampton, which found that the number of witnesses who deliberately failed to attend court was small and that witnesses were much more likely to attend court if the court service kept in regular contact with them? Therefore, does she accept that the Executive's proposal to tag so-called reluctant witnesses is unnecessary and misguided? Given the evidence, would not it be far more productive to invest in witness care programmes?

The Presiding Officer: That is a little wide of the mark, but it is up to the Solicitor General whether or not to reply.

The Solicitor General for Scotland: On the first question, VIA's services are extended to a number of witnesses—who in many cases may be co-victims, particularly if a case involved a bereavement or death. They are also extended to a number of witnesses in solemn cases. One way of keeping persons best informed is to speed up

the process, which is part and parcel of the wider reforms that the Minister for Justice is bringing into play in relation to the Bonomy provisions and consideration of the McInnes review. Delay is one of the bewildering factors for people who are involved in the system.

Most witnesses certainly wish to participate. The process is not easy and much has been done to improve it through the witness support service—which is now present in courts—and the advice that is provided by Victim Support Scotland. However, some witnesses simply do not want to play ball and do not want to be part of the process—they have their own interests. There are also people who, as a result of such recalcitrance and potential contempt of court, would end up in jail. Therefore, I have no difficulty whatever in supporting a measured approach to ensure that those who do not co-operate avoid custody by being tagged in circumstances that are bound to be rare. That approach should be effective and should prevent adjournments for victims of crime.

Off-licences

7. Margaret Jamieson (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it will support the use of test purchasing to highlight those off-licences that sell alcohol to under-age drinkers. (S2O-1514)

The Lord Advocate (Colin Boyd): The Executive can see the benefit in principle of test purchasing for alcohol as a useful means of targeting under-age sales, but there are important issues relating to the welfare of children. I will be exploring with key players whether there is scope for extending test purchasing to alcohol in the light of the tobacco test-purchasing pilots.

Margaret Jamieson: I thank the Lord Advocate for his helpful response. Any support would greatly assist the communities that suffer regularly from the irresponsible actions of those who sell alcohol to under-age drinkers. Will the Lord Advocate give an assurance that every assistance will be given to ensure that those who undertake test purchasing are fully supported when prosecutions take place?

The Lord Advocate: I well understand the damage that alcohol can cause to young people and to the communities in which they live. If test purchasing goes ahead, of course every assistance ought to be given to the children involved. The important point is that test purchasing should not go ahead unless we can guarantee the welfare and safety of the children involved.

General Questions

Diabetes

1. Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive how it will address the rising number of people being diagnosed with diabetes. (S2O-1487)

The Minister for Health and Community Care (Malcolm Chisholm): We are making good progress in addressing that through implementation of the Scottish diabetes framework.

Mike Rumbles: Diabetes UK estimates that more than 120,000 people in Scotland have been diagnosed with diabetes and that another 87,000 have the condition but do not know it yet. Is the minister aware of the free blood sugar testing service that Lloyds Pharmacy provides? What is the Executive doing to encourage other pharmacies to provide that service, so that as many people as possible can be diagnosed and can receive the treatment that they need?

Malcolm Chisholm: Better diagnosis of diabetes is crucial. As the framework is being revised, that is certainly one issue that will be considered as part of the process. I accept fully that much has still to be done. The first reports on the national diabetes standards will be published in two weeks' time, so many deficiencies will be highlighted. While acknowledging those, we should recognise the enormous progress that has been made in the care and treatment of people with diabetes in the past two years since the framework was launched.

I was pleased that a leading clinical body recently said that the Tayside managed clinical network for diabetes was the best in the United Kingdom. It has led the way, but others are following. Investment has been made in managed clinical networks and I spoke at the Lothian diabetes managed clinical network conference recently. Many developments have taken place in information technology and in integrating diabetes care throughout primary care services and the hospital sector. Without being complacent, we can say that Scotland is leading the way on the care of people with diabetes.

Shona Robison (Dundee East) (SNP): Is the minister aware of the proposal in England and Wales no longer to provide blood glucose test strips on the national health service, on the ground of cost? As those strips ensure that diabetics can monitor their blood sugar levels and address any problems that arise, will the minister give a commitment that Scotland has no similar plans and that those strips will continue to be made available on the NHS in Scotland?

Malcolm Chisholm: That is a key issue in relation to what I said to Mike Rumbles about diagnosis. Certainly, no such proposals have been made in Scotland. As Mike Rumbles said in his first question, the incidence of diabetes is increasing. That is one of our major challenges. Type 2 diabetes is related to many matters such as lifestyle and obesity. Major prevention and health improvement issues are involved, but we must make progress—as we are doing—on all the strands of the care and treatment of people with diabetes.

I have mentioned only a selection of matters. The developments in the past couple of years to deal with diabetic retinopathy have also been a major advance in preventing people from going blind because of diabetes—that risk has affected many people in the past.

Mr Keith Raffan (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD): Does the minister agree that one way to address the rising number of people who are diagnosed with diabetes is to increase the number of specialist diabetic nurses, who do a wonderful job? They work closely with general practitioners and can spend more time with patients. They enable more careful monitoring of those who suffer from diabetes and reduce the number of hospital admissions.

Malcolm Chisholm: That is the case. I am glad to have several supplementary questions to answer, because I can add a new strand of the diabetes framework in each answer. Recently, I visited the Scottish primary care collaborative, which brings together many health care professionals from primary care to improve the management of diabetes in primary care. Diabetic specialist nurses are important to that. The group works with four change principles, the last of which is to

“adopt a multi-skilled, multi-agency approach to ensure effective co-ordination of the care of people with diabetes”.

The new general medical services contract will be entirely helpful in achieving that because of the money that will go to practices, the emphasis on quality and the shift of resources into primary care. The management of chronic disease in primary care is one of the great opportunities of the new GMS contract and will be one of the great developments in health care in the next few years.

We hear all the time about the centralisation of services—we will hear about it after 5 o'clock today—but contrary to that is the movement of many services that used to be in hospitals to community settings. Those might be general practitioners' practices or health centres, or they might be diagnostic and treatment centres such as the splendid one that I saw at Stracathro on Friday.

Single Farm Payment Scheme

2. John Farquhar Munro (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive whether any penalties incurred during the reference period will be discounted or carried forward when the calculations for the single farm payment scheme are made. (S2O-1450)

The Deputy Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Allan Wilson): Support under the single farm payment scheme, called payment entitlements, will be based on the numbers of livestock and hectares that are determined as having met all the conditions of the relevant schemes that operated in the reference period. However, I ask Mr Munro to appreciate that the European Commission regulations that will create the framework for dealing with past penalties, non-compliance and the like have not been finalised and that my answer reflects the latest position, but not necessarily the final one.

John Farquhar Munro: I am sure that farmers and crofters will be greatly relieved that they will not be penalised for honest mistakes that were made during the reference period. Will the minister ensure that, when negotiating on the issue with the European Commission, the Scottish Executive makes a robust argument in favour of that position?

Allan Wilson: Yes. I am pleased to give Mr Munro that assurance. Officials from the Scottish Executive Environment and Rural Affairs Department will engage in discussion with their European Union counterparts to ensure that the arrangements are adhered to. If farmers and crofters failed to meet conditions on animals or over-declared land in the reference period, it is fair that their entitlement then should have been reduced. It is understandable that future payments should be based on farming activity that met the scheme conditions. However, any penalties over and above those will be discounted for the purposes of calculating future payment entitlement. In that way, the penalties will not be carried over into future payments. That situation is as it should be; it is fair and equitable in all circumstances.

Physical Education (Primary Schools)

3. Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what progress is being made in increasing the level of physical education provision in primary schools. (S2O-1437)

The Minister for Education and Young People (Peter Peacock): The Scottish Executive supports a number of programmes that are aimed at improving PE in schools and they are leading to increased opportunities in primary schools.

Karen Gillon: Those programmes are welcome, but unless we increase the number of physical education teachers who are available to be involved in primary schools, all those steps forward will not be enough. Will the minister say what steps are being taken to increase the number of physical education teachers in primary schools and what consideration is being given to increasing the level of PE in the curriculum in primary schools?

Peter Peacock: I begin by acknowledging Karen Gillon's consistent work to promote sport. In the first session of Parliament, she was the rapporteur on issues relating to sport for the Education, Culture and Sport Committee, which she subsequently chaired. The Executive has pursued a number of the ideas that came out of the report that was produced at that time.

I expect the results of a review of PE to be reported to me soon. I hope that the report will cover how we ought to treat PE in the curriculum and the issues of improving participation rates, teacher training in PE and the use of specialists across the boundary between secondary and primary school. On that issue, within the historic commitment that we have made to increase teacher numbers to 53,000, we have made it clear that we want extra emphasis to be given to the number of specialist teachers who work across the boundary between the primary and secondary sectors. We hope that, in part, that move will signal an increase in resources for PE teachers.

Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind): I am cheered by what the minister has said, but I am more cheered by the fact that he did not dismiss the matter as the nice minister before him used to do. I am glad that he has seen the light and has decided that there will be more PE in primary schools.

As the minister said, Karen Gillon has pursued the matter, but I do not think that he answered her question. She asked whether the minister will ensure that more time is devoted to PE in the primary school curriculum. May I add to that by saying that PE should be provided in primary schools every day? I like to get my retaliation in first.

The minister will discover that there has been some difficulty in recruiting PE teachers. He should turn his attention to that problem as quickly as possible. He should ensure that schools provide physical education and not theoretical physical education.

The Presiding Officer: Did Ms MacDonald ask a question?

Margo MacDonald: Yes.

Peter Peacock: I acknowledge Margo MacDonald's track record in raising these issues

over the years. I acknowledge that she is passionately committed to improving the fitness of young people through PE in schools.

I am keen to see that more attention is given to PE in our schools. I await the outcome of the review that is being carried out. I have not yet seen the results of the review, which will make recommendations about PE in the curriculum. I will take a view on the review after I have seen what it recommends.

As I indicated to Karen Gillon, I have made it clear in recent days that, as extra teachers are provided in Scotland, we should ensure that there is more emphasis on PE, just as we want to see more emphasis on music, drama and other areas. We are aware that it takes time to train PE teachers, who are usually trained through the four-year degree programme, but we are examining ways of enhancing the training of primary teachers so that we can improve PE provision in primary schools as well as in secondary schools. We hope that the PE review will advise us in that regard.

Mike Watson (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab): Will the minister comment on the suggestion that we should be concerned not only with physical education, but with physical activity in schools, which can take forms other than competitive sport, such as dance and drama? Will he comment on last year's report of the physical activity task force, which stressed the need for a minimum of two hours of physical education in schools each week? I know that the minister is awaiting the PE review, but it might not be possible to fit in two hours of PE each week if other forms of physical activity are not included. Will the minister examine how PE can be married with general physical activity to reach the two-hour threshold that is so important?

Peter Peacock: Mike Watson is right to acknowledge that the review that I am awaiting will give specific advice about the structure of the curriculum and how we should encourage more PE in our schools. He is also right to draw attention to the need to widen our definition of PE to include more modern forms of activity, including dance. We should engage young people in activities to which they can relate and in which they want to participate.

Following the work of the physical activity task force, we have put in place an active primary schools programme. More than half of Scotland's local authorities and many primary schools have signed up to the programme. We want it to continue to be rolled out, so that it is available in every local authority area and every primary school.

Recycling

4. Shiona Baird (North East Scotland) (Green): To ask the Scottish Executive what

percentage of material collected for recycling is processed in Scotland. (S2O-1538)

The Deputy Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Allan Wilson): The Executive does not possess the information requested. The location of processors depends on the markets concerned. Most pre-processing of recycled material, such as the baling of papers, takes place in Scotland. Scottish recycled glass, wood and organic waste are generally reprocessed in Scotland, but other materials are usually transported elsewhere at present.

Shiona Baird: Can the minister explain why a Scottish recycled paper processing mill has stopped processing pulp from paper collected in Scotland? The mill is importing pulp from the international market, while Scottish waste paper due to be pulped and recycled there is transported from Scotland to England and abroad for processing. What is the Scottish Executive doing to remedy this kind of crazy situation? Economics is dictating that mills do not use local waste paper. Thousands of unnecessary transport miles are being added to the cost of recycled paper products.

Allan Wilson: The market will ultimately determine the process by which recycled produce is marketed and reprocessed. I agree with the fundamental point that Shiona Baird makes. To a certain extent, the problem she mentioned is a product of our long-standing poor recycling record. We do not have the capability or the capacity to deal with recycled produce in every eventuality. However, we are building that capacity, and I hope to go to Alloa in the near future to visit the United Glass reprocessing facility.

We have a good record in reprocessing glass, but I appreciate fully that our record is not the same for paper. There are only three newsprint mills in the United Kingdom, none of them in Scotland, so newspaper goes for reprocessing elsewhere. As we develop capacity and invest in greater recycling, I would expect the market to respond to the signals and to create additional processing and reprocessing capacity here in Scotland.

The Presiding Officer: I call Donald Gorrie, who should return to his seat quickly.

Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD): I wanted to ask a supplementary to a previous question, not this one.

The Presiding Officer: Right. In that case we go to question 5.

Child Protection

5. Rhona Brankin (Midlothian) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what plans there are to

improve facilities and training in the area of child protection. (S2O-1524)

The Minister for Education and Young People (Peter Peacock): Training is an on-going and important strand of our child protection reform programme. Investment through the changing children's services fund also finances training and development posts and other local initiatives.

Rhona Brankin: Will the minister stress at the forthcoming child protection summit the absolute necessity for child protection staff working in social work, health, education, the police and the voluntary sector to learn the lessons of recent child protection failures and to share best practice more effectively in their training in future? Will he undertake to consider closely current joint-agency initiatives to improve practice in the area?

Peter Peacock: Rhona Brankin raises an important point. One of the things that we are extraordinarily keen to do is to ensure that every part of the child protection system learns the lessons of all the tragedies that we have seen in recent years. A great deal of our work on the child protection reform programme is designed to achieve that. One of the key things that we must learn from failings in the system is how to improve communication between agencies. Part of the secret of that is to help with providing better joint-agency training at the outset of people's training as well as throughout their career.

We are investing heavily in improving training. We have set up the child protection training group, which is working on child protection training as part of the mandatory post-qualification registration structure in social work. We have funded a two-year post to consider the child protection content of the degree course for social workers. At the forthcoming summit, I will be more than happy to pick up Rhona Brankin's point and to stress that it is vital that we learn lessons and embed proper professional development and training in the work of all our child protection staff.

Agricultural Produce (Promotion)

6. George Lyon (Argyll and Bute) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive how it is promoting Scottish specialist agricultural produce. (S2O-1474)

The Deputy Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Allan Wilson): Assistance can be provided to individual companies, sectoral bodies and trade associations under the agricultural processing and marketing grant scheme to undertake consumer education, market research and dissemination of scientific information. Since the scheme's launch in 2000, £425,000 of assistance has been delivered for activities of that type. The Executive also showcases Scottish food and drink in major

overseas promotions, which to date have been held in Sweden, Catalonia and Tuscany. However, the Executive solely provides the platform for companies and trade bodies to promote themselves.

George Lyon: I thank the minister for that full reply. He will be aware that Quality Meat Scotland receives something like £4 million each year from the Scottish Executive to promote Scottish meat products. Will the minister ask QMS to work closely with the National Farmers Union of Scotland, the Scottish Crofting Foundation and other representative bodies to promote the idea of a genetically-modified-organism-free Scotland? It is in farmers' best interests to go down the GM-free route to respond to consumer concerns about GMOs. Therefore, will the minister assure us that he will do everything possible within the scope of the law to ensure that Scotland remains GM-free?

Allan Wilson: Yes. As I hope I made clear in my response to Alex Fergusson's question yesterday, I believe that there is a synergy between the producers, particularly in the south-west of Scotland and—prospectively—in Fife, and the Scottish Executive in promoting consumer confidence in products and in responding, as the First Minister said only this afternoon, to public unease about the prospect of GM crops, specifically fodder maize, being cultivated here in Scotland. I have been in touch with both the NFUS and the Scottish Landowners Federation with a view to developing that synergy or commonality of purpose to ensure that we can develop our concept of GM-free zones and reap the rewards of whatever marketing advantage can be gained in the short or long term from the creation of GM-free zones.

Ministerial Group on Tourism

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): The next item of business is a statement by Frank McAveety on the outcomes of the ministerial group on tourism. As the minister will take questions at the end of his statement, there shall be no interventions.

15:01

The Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport (Mr Frank McAveety): Presiding Officer, I thank you for providing the time for me to announce the developments in the discussions that have been on-going since the new Executive was established, on the potential of the Scottish tourism industry, with specific reference to a number of key issues such as the present structure of the industry. Tourism is important to Scotland and I am delighted that a substantial number of members are present this afternoon to address issues relating to its future.

Some 215,000 people work in the industry and in related sectors. Since 2001, gross tourism revenues have grown by 6.5 per cent to £4.5 billion and further strong growth was experienced last year. The industry has shown a commitment to overcoming the difficulties that it has faced in recent years, such as the impact of foot-and-mouth disease and international terrorism and the ensuing uncertainty. The industry has to respond to the developing opportunities that exist in relation to world tourism, which has been forecast to continue to grow at more than 4 per cent a year. New markets, higher disposable incomes, cheaper travel and much easier access to information through the internet are all powering that growth. However, there is a wider challenge in that 180 countries are competing for that market share. That market will become even more competitive through the development of the European Union when the accession states join and people have the capacity to move throughout Europe much more quickly than previous generations could.

Scotland is well positioned geographically, with a huge domestic market in the UK right next to our border. With the aid of a route development fund, direct access from Europe and further afield is becoming increasingly effective. Across Scotland, in small and large tourism businesses and related businesses, and in the organisations that support tourism by developing the product, people are working hard to build on the revenue and employment growth of the past two years.

It is therefore important that we emphasise marketing, quality, the development of skills and the training of staff. Most of all, we must recognise the importance of integrated support for tourism. In

the first session of Parliament, one of the key conclusions of the then Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee's report on tourism was that we had to find ways to ensure that support for tourism was much more integrated.

Through VisitScotland, the enterprise networks and other bodies, such as local authorities and Historic Scotland, the Scottish Executive invests more than £80 million a year in tourism. Another £10 million a year for tourism projects currently comes from European funding. That money has been put to good use, particularly with regard to the crisis that the industry faced in early 2001. It has focused on branding Scotland as a world-class destination by playing on its strengths—city breaks, active holidays and our strong heritage and culture package—and on developing visitscotland.com to ensure that we compete in the international market that is accessible through the internet. Combined with that, we have also given a substantial commitment to developing quality accreditation schemes that will prove the worth of the Scottish tourism product. It is important that we continue to emphasise that in the coming period.

We must all get behind the work that is being done on the establishment of VisitScotland. We must try to ensure that Scotland is marketed effectively so, in order to build on what has already been achieved, I am delighted to announce that the Executive will increase VisitScotland's marketing budget. We have added £5 million to this year's marketing budget of £20 million, £5 million will be added to next year's budget, and £7 million will be found for 2005-06. That is a 28 per cent increase in VisitScotland's marketing budget. Most of the new money will be focused on marketing Scotland in other parts of the United Kingdom where there are substantial marketing opportunities, and in the overseas tourism markets that have yet to be fully exploited. This is a response to a challenge that was made to the ministerial group, and to the questions that have been asked in the chamber on numerous occasions. We hope that it will be recognised that we are making a substantial long-term commitment to marketing investment in VisitScotland.

The investment will increase opportunities for urban and rural jobs and it will also be a challenge to the private sector. In my time as minister, I have met representatives of a range of private sector organisations. One of the key things that the private sector asks of the public sector is help with marketing and with identifying additional resources. The relationship that we seek should be joint and reciprocal. There is a challenge to the private sector, which is the dominant driver of the tourism product. We want those businesses to ensure that their contributions match, pound for pound, the joint marketing opportunities with

VisitScotland. VisitScotland is currently working with many business leaders and innovators to ensure that they can rise to that challenge.

The role of the innovators and business is to create new markets, products and opportunities. We should be developing a genuine public-private partnership in order to enhance what is one of our essential industries. We believe that if that industry is properly developed and matched by the private sector, our investment will, during the next two years, help to sustain the growth in gross tourism revenues that we have experienced since 2001, so that they continue to grow and match global growth rates.

We have made a long-term commitment to trying to grow the long-term revenue in Scottish tourism by 50 per cent during the next 10 to 11 years, to more than £6 billion per year. Today's announcement is the first substantial step towards that. We want employment opportunities to grow significantly from their present levels of 215,000 and we have to do that in partnership with those who consume the service: the visitors. As people become more global in their attitudes to travel, destinations are being asked more questions about the quality of services that they provide, which is why we want to upgrade the quality accreditation scheme and extend its scope. I am also delighted to announce that VisitScotland is currently piloting the integration of skills and staff development provision in the quality assurance scheme. We will provide an additional £3 million to upgrade the quality accreditation scheme in the next two years.

The third key commitment is that we will work with staff to ensure that we provide the skilled people to the sector, which is vulnerable because of staff turnover. At the moment, the sector suffers because it has a high proportion of part-time workers and a substantial labour turnover that is double that of other Scottish industries of equivalent scale and revenue.

A high proportion of businesses report skills gaps; we have to identify ways in which we can address that. One of the key commitments in today's announcement is that we will work with the sector, the providers and VisitScotland to ensure that we address the skills gap. I am delighted to be in partnership with the Deputy First Minister and Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning, Jim Wallace, because of the positive role that the enterprise network can play in addressing the problem of the skills gap.

The final key commitment that we make is that we will ensure that local and national strategies are integrated. We have developed VisitScotland's strategy in recent years by acknowledging the competitiveness of the global market and we recognise the importance of the area tourist boards and their role that they have played so far.

A consultation exercise was carried out as part of last year's ATB review, which revealed a wide range of opinion about what changes are needed. Some people argued for retention of the present structure and some for outright abolition of the area tourist board structure. The responses will be published today. However, the key theme that emerged from those discussions and the consultation, as well as from my discussions, was the need to integrate support for tourism throughout Scotland.

We have therefore concluded that Scottish tourism will be best served in the years ahead by the creation of an integrated VisitScotland network, which will be similar to the enterprise network so that it can deliver for the whole of Scotland. To do that, we will replace the existing ATB structure with an integrated Scotland-wide network consisting of local tourism hubs. The hubs will have responsibility for delivery of the national tourism strategy in their areas, but they will also have the ability to respond to local circumstances, as was strongly emphasised by some submissions, which highlighted the need to keep the sense-of-identity dimension that people feel exists in the local area tourist boards.

Setting up the network will require legislation and there are two key ways in which we will work to address how that might best be dealt with. We want to ensure that money is retained within local authorities, so local authorities will be invited to take part in the network through service level agreements. The agreements will allow local authorities to require a level of service in return for the resources that they provide. We want that change to take place over the next year or two, which we recognise will be a very sensitive period.

Through a two-stage process, we will replace the ATBs with 14 local tourism hubs that will be linked to VisitScotland. In the first instance, we will set up two new ATBs, which will act as stepping stones to enable the new network to be up and running by April 2005. We anticipate that another year of development work will be needed after April 2005. As minister, I give my commitment to lead that transition process in partnership with VisitScotland and providers in the sector. At the second stage, we will introduce primary legislation that will formalise the new network and replace the ATBs with the new model. I stress that we want to retain within the new structure the best that exists within the current ATB structure, and we want to ensure that that is tied into a national network strategy.

It is right that we have taken time to get the proposals right. People argued for marketing investment; we have delivered that. People argued for training and skills to be central to the debate and for quality to be improved and all those things

are contained in my statement, which I commend to members. Scotland and tourism are inextricably linked. Given global change, our tourism industry will last longer than many other sectors of the economy, so it is our responsibility to get it right. I believe that my statement today is one step along that way.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I will allow 20 minutes for questions on the issues that have been raised in the minister's statement. After that, we will need to move on to the next item of business. I already have a considerable number of members who wish to speak and I will not be able to fit them all in, so it would be helpful if members were concise in their questions.

Mr Kenny MacAskill (Lothians) (SNP): Four years on and four ministers later, many more questions than answers remain. The additional marketing funding is welcome, as are some of the directional changes, but I note that the funding is still less than it was two years ago and that VisitScotland will still be heavily outspent by Tourism Ireland, which is our major competitor. VisitScotland must become a lean marketing machine, not a tourism police force or tourism bureaucracy. The abolition of having to pay for the privilege of selling Scotland is long overdue. However, will the minister tell us who will sell Scotland abroad? Will that be done by VisitScotland or VisitBritain? In the absence of agreement between them, who will decide?

Mr McAveety: I welcome the recognition of the substantial increase in marketing that lies underneath Kenny MacAskill's question. We want to try to ensure that Scottish tourism can compete with other nations throughout Europe. I know that different countries have different ways of calculating the investment that they inject into tourism, but a 28 per cent increase is probably higher even than the ambitious spending commitments that Kenny MacAskill has previously provided.

The key issue that Kenny MacAskill identified was about how we market Scotland. I assure him that VisitScotland is actively pursuing different markets, for example in north America, where Canada provides a substantial opportunity for generating tourism. We are also pursuing new product development through our route development fund for air flights and through our commitment to the ferry connection.

A key message both from the assessment that we have been carrying out and from the submissions is that there are substantial opportunities right on our doorstep, given that 50 per cent of those who reside in England have yet even to visit Scotland and to have the pleasure of the tourism product that our country has to offer. That is a reasonable ambition. With the new

marketing money, I am sure that we will penetrate the English market to ensure that Scotland gets its fair share of that market as well as of the market across the whole UK and beyond.

Marilyn Livingstone (Kirkcaldy) (Lab): I thank the minister for his statement and I welcome the increased funding package that he has announced today. However, I draw his attention to the effective partnership that currently exists in Fife, which has significant support from the population and from constituency MSPs. That partnership has resulted in a 10 per cent increase in tourism-related spending in the kingdom in the past year, and we now have 6,000 full-time equivalent jobs directly relating to tourism. What steps is the minister taking to ensure that those relationships in Fife, which are currently working to the benefit of Scotland's tourism industry, will be able to flourish under the new arrangement? What steps will he take to ensure that the local authority contribution—both in expertise and in funding—which has been valuable and effective, can be continued in a spirit of mutual partnership?

Mr McAveety: I assure Marilyn Livingstone that we value the substantial input that local authorities provide in their commitment to the existing tourism product, not just in the direct support that many authorities provide for area tourism boards, but in their commitment to the quality and range of facilities that they provide in visitor attractions. As we develop the proposals, one of the key opportunities will be in that service level agreements will empower those who are purchasing the service to be quite clear about what they want. That should give them clear direction about what they will get back in return. What emerged from earlier contributions to the debate was that there was a lack of clarity, with people feeling that they were putting some resources in without getting quite what they expected in return. The new arrangement will be service led.

If we continue the developing process that we want, the role of the tourism hubs will be to look at places where there have been good models of partnership. The hubs will recognise that if such a partnership has been successful in the promotion of Fife, it will be something that they should wish to continue. I give a commitment that I am willing to meet members and others to ensure that, if there are good practices that they want to see sustained as the new arrangements evolve over the next year or two, I will give what support I can as a minister in that process.

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): I welcome the statement because it is positive. I know that it will be welcomed in the Borders; there is much in the statement that was in Scottish Borders Tourist

Board's own submission. Given that local authorities will continue to have a strong role, and given the positive fact that coterminosity between local enterprise companies, local authorities and the hubs will be maintained, will the minister ensure that there is a continuing democratic element in the relationship, especially in the supervision of contracts and service level agreements?

Mr McAveety: I will be happy to address those detailed operational matters. Next week, I shall be meeting representatives of VisitScotland to address how we move forward on that commitment. However, I emphasise what I said earlier—local authorities have a significant role to play. If they were to reduce the level of contribution that they make, that would leave a substantial hole which would, in fact, be equivalent to the level of additional resources that we have already injected. We are ambitious to ensure that local authorities work well.

Last week, I noted with interest a magazine article about Wellingborough in England, which said that

"councillors from Wellingborough Borough Council voted to shut the tourism information centre after they admitted they would struggle to name a single tourist attraction in the town."

It quoted a Conservative member in Wellingborough north as saying after that decision:

"We are not saying no to tourism."

I hope that the contributions this afternoon from members of different political persuasions will acknowledge that we are saying yes to tourism. We believe that tourism has a role to play at local and national levels.

Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I shall try to be positive. I am glad that the minister is putting another £17 million into tourism over the next three years, given that the industry generates £4.5 billion. I am glad that there appears to be no top slicing of the money for local authorities and I am glad that the new money will go mostly towards marketing Scotland in previously unexploited areas. I welcome the minister's emphasis on the importance of training quality staff. If he is upgrading VisitScotland's quality accreditation scheme, will he ensure that he considers what is available for tourists to do rather than just consider the colour of teacups or curtains? Will he bring in a body to replace Taste of Scotland, or will he resurrect Taste of Scotland?

I cannot believe that it has taken three years to come up with this.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Do you have a question?

Mr McGrigor: You have already heard two.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I would like another one.

Mr McAveety: I would like to answer those two.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Just a minute, minister.

Mr McGrigor: Okay, Presiding Officer. Why has the review taken so long? Will the minister apologise to tourism operators for the fact that it has taken so long? Will the Executive realise that its control-freak mentality of bringing ATBs—under another name—under VisitScotland's wing is exactly the top-down approach that the industry does not want? When will the Executive understand that VisitScotland's job should be to market Scotland throughout the United Kingdom and abroad, and that the ATBs' role is to act as membership organisations that understand what is important in their own areas?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I think that we get the theme, Mr McGrigor.

Mr McGrigor: Will VisitScotland produce a decent infrastructure that allows Scottish tourism operators to use their imagination—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr McGrigor!

Mr McGrigor:—their pride and their passion—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr McGrigor, will you finish now, please?

Mr McGrigor:—to get on with their jobs?

Mr McAveety: I have nearly forgotten what the first two questions were now. However, that is the first time I have been able to persuade a Tory to say "Yes, yes," which reminds me of the campaign for the Scottish Parliament.

The reason why we took our time was that, when I became Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport, I recognised that the problem was about more than just the structure of area tourist boards. The matter is more fundamental than that and I am glad that Mr McGrigor has welcomed the substantial injection of new money, which has to be matched by a commitment from the private sector. Fundamentally, the drive of innovation comes from private sector businesses. VisitScotland is considering ways of addressing the issues around the Taste of Scotland campaign. I am aware that VisitScotland is in discussions to bring forward something that might address the concerns that Mr McGrigor has had on the issue in the past.

As far as the idea of centralisation is concerned, I have in front of me some views that indicate that many local tourist boards have welcomed the idea of integration as part of a national and local strategy of working better in partnership. One of the important questions to come out of the review,

in relation to structures and the role of the national tourism agency, was about how we can reduce duplication on things that do not matter and maximise co-operation on things that do matter. The key message was about selling this country's tourism product, in comparison with those of other countries around the world, encouraging Scots to continue to choose Scotland as a holiday destination and ensuring that the range and scale of Scottish tourism may be markedly improved, which can happen only if we can penetrate the markets that are located right on our doorstep.

The network that I have announced today is about pulling those efforts together. I want to give an assurance that, working with the industry and with local partnerships, we can get the best of what is local and the best of what is national to create the best for Scotland.

Alasdair Morgan (South of Scotland) (SNP): The minister mentioned two new ATBs, which I think are to be temporary, but he skated over that part of his statement very quickly. Can the minister tell me the logic of that arrangement? Can he tell me where those two ATBs will be? It sounds like a short-term political fix. Can the minister confirm that a "hub" is just a nice name for a local branch office? It may be a good idea, but we should perhaps just call it that, if that is what it is.

I think that the minister implied that service level agreements for councils will not be compulsory. We know that many councils currently do not fund their local tourist boards very well. Is not there a great danger that, where the local district office—or hub or whatever—represents a whole lot of council areas, individual councils in the area will be reluctant to develop contracts with that office?

Mr McAveety: I would argue passionately that the opposite is the case. The great opportunity for local government is to demonstrate that, if people believe that there should be a tourism strategy at local level, in which a local authority can have a critical role to play, it will make resources available for that. If local authorities make such a commitment, they will want it to be demonstrated that they are getting services back in return. That is a reciprocal arrangement, which I want to be developed.

I did not want to be prescriptive because I believe in the autonomy of local government. I believe that local authorities should have the right to determine what the priorities for their areas are. I know that there have been some inconsistencies across funding packages for area tourist boards; that was one of the reasons for having the review in the first place. I hope that the new marketing money, the national strategy and our desire that tourism be one of the key industries in Scotland all send a strong message. There are enough good local examples for local authorities to be able to make their contribution.

I was asked about the definition of the word "hub". In my understanding, a hub is a place in which people come together. It is a thriving place of activities, ideas and enjoyment. I am sure that that will be part of the tourism product for the future.

Dr Sylvia Jackson (Stirling) (Lab): I thank the minister for his announcement, and particularly for his comments on training and skills, which, as he will remember, are areas that were highlighted at the Stirling tourism conference.

I turn to historic buildings which, as the minister knows, are one of the big attractions for tourists to Scotland. Does the minister agree that as well as existing buildings, such as the Wallace monument, and their maintenance, we need to consider how to get new projects to attract tourists? That would include projects like the Bannockburn heritage centre, which is the interpretation centre for the battle of Bannockburn, and which the National Trust for Scotland and Stirling Council are promoting. Does the minister accept that we need to be alive to such issues?

Mr McAveety: I welcome that contribution. After this meeting, there will be a substantial discussion on the role of the built environment, historic architecture and historic artefacts in Scotland and about the impact that they have on local economies. Stirling Council has been innovative in recent years and, under different leaderships, it has shown drive, energy and commitment to Stirling Castle, which is one of the jewels in the crown of the castle product that we have in Scotland. That was achieved through commitment by the local authority; I hope that there will be similar ambition in relation to the Bannockburn heritage centre. I have visited that centre repeatedly and I recognise that it requires substantial improvement to meet the expectations of the modern visitor. I hope that a partnership can be put together to enable that to happen, and I hope that the centre will be able to resource itself through the heritage lottery fund and other sources of funding.

One of the key facts that comes from the evidence that we have received and from our assessment of tourism is that heritage and culture are linked inextricably and that they are among the key defining and unique selling points of the Scottish tourism product. We would like to encourage them in Sylvia Jackson's area and in many other parts of Scotland.

David Mundell (South of Scotland) (Con): Does the minister accept that the statement that he made this afternoon will be pretty incomprehensible to the average provider in the tourism industry in areas such as the south of Scotland? Will he put his man-of-the-people hat back on and explain to us in simple terms how his

proposals will be industry led, as the tourism inquiry report suggested? Where will the small tourism provider fit into this brave new world?

Mr McAveety: I am happy to indicate that we believe that if we have service level agreements for local authorities, they will also apply to the small providers in the tourism industry. If people contribute, they should have a clear definition of what they will get back.

The second and most important point is on comprehensibility. Virtually all the submissions argued for an integrated network, but they recognised that there needs to be a local dimension. One or two articles have appeared in the local press in the south of Scotland claiming that the local area tourist board will disappear and that the capacity of the local area to influence tourism product will no longer exist; I understand that calls have been made about Jim Wallace in that respect. I hope that members have been reassured today that we recognise the role of the local area and, more importantly, that we want to work with tourism hubs, VisitScotland and the marketing money to make a genuine difference. I hope that David Mundell, as a Conservative who believes in economic growth, will welcome that in the local press next week.

Chris Ballance (South of Scotland) (Green): I welcome many aspects of the statement, but I have three brief questions for the minister. First, his aim to harness the expertise and enthusiasm of the people in the ATB structure is excellent, but can he provide assurances on how he will do that, given the uncertainty that will hang over the tourism industry during the period of reorganisation? Secondly, does the minister have plans to build on the success of the green tourism business standard, perhaps by incorporating elements of it into quality accreditation schemes? Finally, I note his comment on the benefits of the route development fund and I would be grateful if he would tell me whether he has statistics to show that, since it was set up, it attracts more tourists into Scotland than out of Scotland.

Mr McAveety: I assure Chris Ballance that VisitScotland will be asked to lead the implementation of what I have announced this afternoon. I am happy to be working with VisitScotland to ensure that many of the key commitments that I have identified will be pursued. I recognise the fact that there will be a period of uncertainty as we move toward the transition stage. We want to minimise that uncertainty and maximise the opportunity within it. That will take time, and we must work with staff to ensure that we do that. The chief executives of the area tourist boards in the south of Scotland have taken two days to address those issues beyond today's announcement, and VisitScotland will be charged with developing that.

I recognise the role that Chris Ballance has identified. We met recently to discuss the opportunities for green tourism, and I attended and spoke at a recent green tourism conference. One of our key messages is that we want to triple the number of businesses and organisations in the accreditation scheme for green tourism. In terms of potential new markets—particularly the European and east European markets—there is a strong sense of trying to address that.

On the route development fund, I do not have figures immediately to hand. However, since its introduction, the air link between Prestwick and Girona has been responsible for a substantial influx of visitors from that part of Spain. We look forward to that being a positive experience, in the light of the footballing engagement this evening. We now have a balance between those who would visit the attractions of Catalonia and the Catalans who come over here. That is part of the measure. If the member wants me to provide further details on that, I will be happy to do so.

Historic Environment

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): The next item of business is a debate on motion S2M-1033, in the name of Frank McAveety, on the historic environment as a valuable resource for Scotland, and two amendments to the motion.

15:32

The Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport (Mr Frank McAveety): Scotland's heritage: what is it? It is the broad panoply of our inherited and contemporary culture, which the First Minister, in his St Andrew's day speech, described as Scotland's great gift to the world. Our historic environment—with its rich heritage of historic buildings, conservation areas, monuments, archaeology, gardens and landscapes—is a major part of our diverse cultural life at national and local level. In 1963, President John F Kennedy said:

"I look forward to an America which will not be afraid of grace and beauty, ... which will preserve the great old American houses and squares and parks of our national past and which will build handsome and balanced cities for our future."

I share that aspiration for our country.

Our built environment and built heritage is a fantastic resource. It is our common inheritance and it should be our vision that it can and must be conserved for its own sake and for future generations. We are the custodians of what we have at present for those who should benefit from it in the future.

This is about quality of place, and the places where we grow up have an influence on our development. The built heritage shapes communities, giving people a sense of place and identity. It helps people to know who they are and where they have come from, and it is no exaggeration to say that the historic environment is crucial to the health of the nation.

Scotland is unique in having four world heritage sites that are recognised by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation as having universal cultural value to mankind. Today, we speak in the very heart of one. We have nearly 8,000 scheduled monuments, 46,000 listed buildings and 600 conservation areas. They range from historic burghs and town centres throughout the country to city centres in our large conurbations, and we have an archaeological resource that is second to none for its range and quality. For example, in Orkney, we have in the care of Scottish ministers the earliest visible stone-built houses in Europe, and our proposed nomination of the Antonine wall as a world heritage site reminds us of Scotland's links to the rest of the world.

I move on to cultural tourism. I note that there are occasional folk singers in the chamber this afternoon—as long as they do not burst into song, we should be fine. Our rich historic environment is the principal reason why people come to Scotland. People do not always come here for the weather; they come for the brochs and castles, the historic houses and burghs, the standing stones and the work of world-renowned architects such as Charles Rennie Mackintosh, Robert Adam and Alexander "Greek" Thomson. As I said earlier, 83 per cent of visitors from abroad visit a historic site during their stay in Scotland.

Some of those sites are critical. For example, Skara Brae and Edinburgh Castle are cared for by Historic Scotland on behalf of the Scottish ministers and the Scottish Executive. Others are in the care of the National Trust for Scotland or in the hands of local authorities, voluntary trusts or private individuals. We each have a responsibility to deal with those organisations or individuals.

Murray Tosh (West of Scotland) (Con): Given what the minister has just said, has the Executive any proposals to conserve and preserve Castle Tioram in Moidart, which Graeme Munro described a couple of years ago as one of Scotland's truly iconic buildings?

Mr McAveety: We have already held discussions on that matter. Obviously, a number of planning issues relate to the site that the member has mentioned and some of the discussions with the individuals concerned and Historic Scotland are sensitive. As a result, I will refrain from saying anything specific on the matter, other than to point out that we seek a recognition that any developments respect the historic importance of buildings. In some cases, a balance must be struck between the building's present condition and its potential. Much of this debate centres on making difficult but important decisions about the buildings that we can improve, the investments that can be made and the buildings that might need to be preserved as they stand. Such debates are very sensitive, but I assure the chamber that a number of members have raised this specific matter with me. Indeed, I am due to meet several Highlands and Islands members to discuss it.

Heritage-led economic regeneration and development are important. For example, half of all the expenditure in the construction industry—£1.5 billion—is spent on the conservation, repair and maintenance of our historic buildings, monuments and townscapes. Since 1991, we have spent more than £100 million in Historic Scotland grants to support the regeneration of old buildings, giving them new life and purpose. That investment has levered in an additional £200 million to support professional and craft skills in the construction industry. The role of the heritage lottery fund has also been critical in that respect.

For this debate, I made a point of looking at the importance of the historic environment in my constituency. Very often, press coverage of the east end of Glasgow concentrates on negative aspects of the community's life and health. However, we have made a commitment to develop Parkhead Cross; that development will begin very soon and the heritage lottery fund will make a substantial contribution to that part of Glasgow for the first time ever.

I should also mention the development of Glasgow green and of the St Francis centre, which features the sensitive restoration of a very beautiful church by Page and Park Architects. A range of innovative ideas and developments are drawing money from Historic Scotland, the heritage lottery fund, local authorities and other sources to ensure that heritage plays a part in economic regeneration. Indeed, there are many other examples of such developments throughout Scotland.

We must also ensure that a sustainable development theme runs through everything we do with regard to our heritage. It is important that our investment is not wasted and we must acknowledge that such opportunities must be sustained for future generations. Although Historic Scotland's role in carrying out ministers' responsibilities will not always be popular, I should point out that sustainable development is one of our key themes.

Dr Sylvia Jackson (Stirling) (Lab): Does the minister agree that one of the very important aspects of restoring historic buildings such as the Tolbooth in Stirling is not to forget the community that lives around them and to ensure that people are able to use them as much as possible? As he pointed out, it is important to consider economic aspects, social needs and the development of cultural, musical and other skills. Indeed, the minister himself tried out such skills at the Tolbooth.

Mr McAveety: And the CD will be available shortly.

I was about to talk about our role in developing opportunities to ensure that our heritage is available to as many people as possible. Indeed, the example that Dr Jackson mentioned provides a very good illustration of how young people's needs—in this case, in Stirling—are being addressed in a contemporary interpretation of a very traditional building that puts together the old and the new. The Tolbooth in Stirling provides a very powerful example of how great architecture and design can have a wider use in that area and in the rest of central Scotland.

I have only a few minutes left—if I am lucky—in which to make my concluding points. However,

partnership is the next key issue and the role of local authorities is critical within that. A key theme for the Historic Environment Advisory Council for Scotland in considering the role of local authorities and Historic Scotland is to push forward good partnerships. I have discussed that with the council. Where good partnership has occurred, it has made a difference, so we must ensure that the partners get round the table.

Mr Ted Brocklebank (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Will the minister take an intervention?

Mr McAveety: I do not know whether I have time to do so.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The minister is in his final few minutes.

Mr McAveety: We recently published the review of Historic Scotland. I believe that that review, along with personnel changes in the near future, will drive forward a different way of Historic Scotland operating on our behalf. I am convinced that the skills and potential within that organisation and within other relevant agencies will sustain the historic environment in Scotland in the future. I hope that we can defend and maintain that environment.

The Executive is happy to accept Jamie McGrigor's amendment. Unfortunately, we reject Roseanna Cunningham's amendment.

I move,

That the Parliament recognises that Scotland's rich heritage of historic buildings, conservation areas, monuments, archaeology, gardens and landscapes makes an important contribution to the cultural, economic and social well-being of contemporary Scotland.

15:41

Roseanna Cunningham (Perth) (SNP): I was absolutely with the minister right up to his final phrase. I could not have agreed more with everything he said before that. However, my problem is that I do not know what he is trying to achieve by the debate. If he does not have something specific to say about the historic environment, why are we having the debate? The purpose of my amendment is to try to say something specific about the historic environment. I hoped to hear something meaty in the minister's speech, but we got only an expansion of a vague and anodyne motion. I will support that motion, but I believe that we should also be talking about the present and the future of our historic environment.

It is important that we recognise the work that is being done to ensure that our archaeological sites, historic buildings, gardens and monuments are protected, conserved and promoted as visitor attractions. Once visitors have been attracted, it is important to provide appropriate interpretations to

enable them to maximise their experience. Many organisations are involved in that process, as are individuals, many of whom are volunteers. Those volunteers are the unsung heroes without whom much of our historic environment would not be what it is today and would not be getting presented to tourists from Scotland and elsewhere.

The volunteers cannot achieve miracles, so it would be wrong to pretend that huge improvements cannot be made and that there are no overgrown paths, missing signs or crumbling buildings. At present, 1,161 buildings are registered as being at risk. As far as we know, 208 historic buildings, which were mostly listed, have been demolished since 1990. Public funding of the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland has fallen in real terms by about 35 per cent since 1990. In addition, Historic Scotland's budget allocation for rescue archaeology has fallen by about 33 per cent since 1994. Currently, there is no national statutory designation mechanism for protecting and managing cultural landscapes, such as battlefields, and no effective protection for gardens and designed landscapes. Given Scotland's history, battlefields in particular are a substantial and significant part of the historic environment and are, indeed, what tourists are interested in. Therefore, there are big gaps and big problems.

There is a real concern that a chronic under-resourcing of historic environment interests at local government level leads to ill-informed development-control decisions and wastes opportunities for enhancing local community and tourist interest. If the minister contends that sufficient resources are available, he must explain why we are in our current situation.

The distribution of funding is also a matter of concern. I have a relevant example from my constituency. I was concerned to learn from the Perth and Kinross Heritage Trust that Aberdeen, Dundee, Inverness and Stirling are to share in an annual £1 million scheme to set up four city heritage trusts, although Perth and Kinross, which has some 3,450 listed buildings and 33 conservation areas, was awarded only £5,532 in historic building grants by Historic Scotland in 2002-03. Dundee, which has 1,000 listed buildings and 16 conservation areas, is in line to get a great windfall, while Perth and Kinross—which has three times the number of equivalent sites—will get a pittance.

I have no doubt that that situation is replicated throughout Scotland, but how can it be justified? Surely we are not saying that the historic environment is more important in one area than it is in another. The issue is not about saying that Aberdeen, Dundee, Inverness and Stirling deserve

less—of course they do not—but there is a serious question about the Executive's commitment to the historic environment throughout Scotland; I presume that today's debate is about the whole of Scotland.

I was glad to hear the minister's comments on the Antonine wall, about which I have written to him recently but, in parts, its state of repair is extremely poor. That is the kind of issue that we should be addressing. Historic Scotland is putting together a case for the wall to be granted world heritage status and, given that it is a physical reminder of an extremely important period in Scottish, European and world history, that case will be strong. I make a plea for the inclusion in that proposal of the Gask ridge in my constituency. Although it is not part of the Antonine wall, it is the site of what was the oldest and northernmost linear defence system in the entire Roman empire and is therefore of real significance.

We need a review, not of Historic Scotland the organisation, but of Scotland's historic environment. We need processes that ensure that the information is updated regularly. Does the minister intend to implement the recommendations that were made in the relatively recent report "Review of the Structure and Functions of Historic Scotland", or will he lend his support to the joint initiative between Scottish Environment LINK and the Built Environment Forum Scotland that will report in May, about which he has said nothing?

If we want to send out a message to all those people who are involved in the historic environment in Scotland today that we recognise the difficulties that they face and want to assist them in their important work, we should agree to a motion that does more than state the obvious.

That is why I move amendment S2M-1033.2, to insert at end:

"; regrets that, notwithstanding the work done by individuals and organisations, there remain serious concerns about (a) a lack of both resources and information and (b) the failure to sufficiently protect, conserve, interpret and promote Scotland's historic environment and endorses the call for a review of the historic environment backed up by a regular audit to measure progress."

15:47

Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): In this country, we have priceless historical assets and the rest of the world simply cannot understand why we do so little with them. There seems to be a mindset against advertising our historic and colourful past and a presumption in favour of getting away from an image of castles, tartan and thistles. I am certainly not against the modern image, even if it is depicted by Russian catwalk models; all that I am saying is that, in Scotland, we must make the most of both facets—

the old and the new. Anyone in advertising would tell us that it is a mistake to try to change people's mindset; it is much cleverer to go with the flow and embellish it.

Many members of the Scottish diaspora come here to seek their roots. They love their tartans and they seek their history. Scotland is the capital and the Mecca of tartan, so it is surely time that we had a proper national register of tartans in Scotland. I ask the minister to think about that.

Young Scots should be taught about their history so that they can be proud of it. We have an extraordinary legacy of historic buildings and sites, which date back to pre-Neolithic times—5,000 years' worth of artefacts and sites, all of which can be explored. We must use our imagination to capitalise on that history, because there is a demand for it worldwide.

Some parts of the country, such as Orkney, already do that well, but I want to highlight the excellence of the historical museum at Kilmartin in Argyll, which has done so much to interpret the lives and times of the inhabitants of early Scotland around Dunadd and the Kilmartin valley, where the kings of Dalriada, the original Scots, were crowned. Unfortunately, that award-winning museum faces closure through lack of funding. That would be a disaster for the community and it should not be allowed to happen in a country in which our First Minister pledged to put culture at the heart of all that we do. It is unfortunate that the situation of Kilmartin museum is not an isolated example and I beseech the Executive to accept the importance of such rural museums for education, tourism and employment.

The RCAHMS, which has produced excellent volumes on the ancient history of sites, again appears to be underfunded.

Kilchurn castle at the head of Loch Awe, which features, in all its grandeur, on the VisitScotland website, is now very difficult to get to on foot, because Network Rail has locked the access gates. I hope that the minister is aware of that. I also hope that VisitScotland is aware of what has happened to its icon.

The review of Historic Scotland that Frank McAveety commissioned in 2003 concluded that there is little trust among applicants to Historic Scotland for consent on modernisation. It stated:

"There is a perception that Historic Scotland acts as judge and jury in its own court."

That is hardly surprising when one considers that only one out of 220 applications received scheduled monument consent and only one out of 2,600 applications received listed building or conservation area consent in 2003.

That brings me to the strange case of Mr Lex Brown and Castle Tioram. I am at a complete loss

to understand Historic Scotland's thinking in the case of the rebuilding of Castle Tioram on the Moidart peninsula. Can the minister explain why it is wrong for an individual to spend £4.5 million of his own money on the restoration of a 13th century castle to its 1715 condition? Is it wrong that he should want to live there? Is it wrong that he should wish to create a museum for the public? Is it wrong that he should create spin-off benefits and employment for the local community and for local hotels and bed and breakfasts?

Historic Scotland seems to think that that is wrong, despite 70 per cent of the local population around Acharacle signing a petition in support of the renovation and Highland Council giving the go-ahead to the plan, which seems democratic enough to me. The renovator is not asking for money; he seeks permission to spend his own money on the restoration of a piece of Scotland's heritage that without renovation will crumble into the sea. Will the minister look at the case and at the prejudice that is blocking a good idea from becoming a reality for the people of Moidart?

Many Scottish castles were destroyed during the Jacobite rebellion. Does Historic Scotland want to leave Scotland with so many monuments to a period of great suffering? Surely it would rather see at least some of them refurbished to their original glorious state. Do we have to wallow in perpetual nostalgia and sadness on the other side of sorrow? I hope not. I hope that VisitScotland will link with Historic Scotland to produce a strategy that promotes historic tourism and uses our historic assets for the benefit of Scotland.

I move amendment S2M-1033.1, to insert at end:

"and believes that Historic Scotland, in its policies, must be mindful of the immense benefits to employment, income and culture brought by tourism and, in particular, art and archaeological tourism."

15:52

Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD): I declare an interest: I put into my curriculum vitae that one of my interests is visiting ruins. Nowadays, I should add "visiting the Falkirk wheel", as we take all our visitors there, too. The ruins excite us about the past and the Falkirk wheel excites us about the present and the future.

We must invest more in the things that we are discussing today. Like many other government activities in this country, they are under-resourced. Investment would pay off in terms of employment, the development of tourism and, above all, the development of education. I will focus on education.

The ignorance of many Scots about our past is appalling. We have to tackle that. If we improve on

it, we will increase the feel-good factor that spins off into better behaviour, more vigorous work and so on. In a members' business debate next Wednesday, I will suggest that we could focus on St Andrew's day as a time in which we could develop an interest in things Scottish.

We are not good about knowing about our past. Let us take the example of the field of Bannockburn: I have a fair number of books that cover the battle, every one of which has the battle in a different place. That is not our fault, as people in the past were so disorganised that they could not even agree on the place where the battle took place.

We are beginning to deal with other aspects of our historic environment better. The visitors I take to New Lanark or Culross can get a real feeling for Scottish life in those places. We have to develop more places like that. We have to excite people, families and young people to imagine their ancestors' lives.

Some good things are being done by Historic Scotland such as the great hall at Stirling Castle, which was quite controversial. We should be more active in reconstructing the past in an intelligent way. We have to recreate the past. It can be done very simply. For example, baskets of replica medieval clothes are made available at Craigmillar Castle for kids to wear when a class goes there. The children enjoy dressing up in them. We could be much more active in developing that sort of work.

Other people do things better. The Americans have little history and therefore must make the most of what they have. Places such as Williamsburg are tremendous. There are genuinely old buildings, reconstructions of old buildings and people dressed up and making musical instruments as people did in 1800. We could do much more of that type of thing.

We could also rebuild old buildings. Some eastern European cities, such as Riga, have many splendid old buildings. Many of those buildings were destroyed in the war, but they have been rebuilt and they fit in well. We should be much more relaxed about rebuilding.

We should show people what their ancestors' working and domestic lives were like. Kitchens are among the most interesting things to most people when they visit stately homes because we can relate to kitchens and can see what people's lives were really like. There are also good examples that show people what life was like in locomotive factories, shipyards, mills, crofts and so on throughout the country. However, we need to have many more examples so that people can see how their ancestors lived and worked. We also need more support for interesting local developments,

such as museums, and especially live museums such as the Bo'ness railway and the Wanlockhead museum of lead mining, in which people can experience life as it was.

We can develop computerisation of how things were in the past. In my innocent youth, I got much of my enthusiasm for drawings from Alan Sorrell's reconstructions of how things were. Nowadays, young people can get far more from computers, for example.

I want to make one or two specific points. We could make much more use of models, which have a definite appeal to people. Models can show, for example, how a city or a town grew—there can be models of Edinburgh or Aberdeen, for example, in 1300, 1500 and 1600. People respond to models and a lot of work is created for people who build them. Such things can provide employment and education.

There should be more re-enactments of events. For example, the capture of Edinburgh Castle by the Earl of Moray is unique in medieval warfare as an example of a major castle being captured by escalade. That should be re-enacted as part of the festival, the tattoo or the fireworks display, for example.

Finally, I have a moan. Historic Scotland has many cheap foreign-made souvenirs. Surely Historic Scotland, more than anyone else, should have good-quality, Scottish-made souvenirs.

15:57

Christine May (Central Fife) (Lab): First, I must declare an interest. I am a trustee of the Fife Historic Buildings Trust.

I invite members to imagine Scotland without castles, great gardens, fine streetscapes, historic burghs and the farms and fields that are the framework for the landscape. Imagine not commemorating our great battles where they happened or not caring about our ancient and more recent archaeology. Would people still come to Scotland in their tens of millions? Would businesses still relocate to Scotland because of the high quality of life here? Would local people still feel strong ties to their historic roots?

To a greater or lesser extent, all those aspects of the historic environment are under threat of change. Therefore, do we invest enough to care for that heritage in relation to the enormous amount that we get out of it in economic terms, from tourism and attracting jobs, in social terms, through its contribution to our quality of life, and—at a fundamental level—in respect of what it means to be Scottish?

Our varied history and scenery are one of the main reasons why tourists visit us—apart, of

course, from those hundreds of beautiful people who are found in the summer basking on the white sand under the tropical sun. Tourists come because virtually every town has a castle or a church with a bit of history behind it. If it does not, there will be some other nugget of local history waiting to be discovered. For example, I draw to members' attention the bronze age burial site that was recently discovered in Leven and was the subject of a "Time Team" television programme. The time team will return in June and I invite the minister to visit then, if he has time in his schedule. I also draw attention to the Methil heritage centre, which is also in my constituency. It showcases not only the ancient environment, but the more recent industrial environment. It is successful and has won many awards.

Between 60 and 80 per cent of tourists visit heritage attractions during their stay, and 30 per cent cite heritage attractions as their sole reason for visiting. That generates a lot of money for Scotland's tourism industry and, indirectly, for many other areas of business.

There is also architecture which, particularly in this wonderful city of Edinburgh, appears to have something different about it virtually every time one passes it. If members do not believe me, I invite them to take a look as they pass New College this evening and tell me whether they can see the cat coming down the chimney on the row of houses.

Mr Brocklebank: I agree fully with what Christine May said about the wonderful historic buildings throughout Scotland, but does she agree that the recent decision to stop historic visitor attractions being able to claim back gift aid on admission income will have a significant and negative impact on many of the operators of those historic sites?

Christine May: Any change like that is bound to cause difficulties, and if there is a case for reviewing the change, I would support it.

A number of things could be done to improve protection for the historic environment, many of which will require investment. However, Historic Scotland does a good job. It has been suggested that the officers of Historic Scotland who are currently based in Edinburgh and have specific responsibility for outlying areas such as Orkney and Shetland could move to those communities, which might lead to some of the buy-in that was referred to earlier.

Organisations such as Fife Historic Buildings Trust have been remarkably successful not only in developing partnerships to repair and restore historic buildings, but in bringing in quite a lot of money from the European regional development fund and other sources of funding. It recently

completed a project in the riggs area of Kirkcaldy, in Marilyn Livingstone's constituency, to train roads operators in using lime mortar when they repair old walls. As many members will know, it is the use of cement mortar that causes a great deal of problems in old walls.

There is a big issue with sites and monuments records. Planning authorities need to have access to them. Will the minister assure us that he will consider placing a statutory duty on local authorities to keep such records, and will he fight for more money for the historic environment in the next spending round?

16:02

Alasdair Morgan (South of Scotland) (SNP): I am busily wondering how I can get lime mortar from B&Q—perhaps I will put it on my list. Moreover, following Donald Gorrie's request for re-enactments, I look forward to the minister leading the charge and scaling the rock of Edinburgh Castle. We will all be right behind him.

The topic of the debate is not urgent, but it is important, as can be judged by the number of submissions that members have received from interested bodies that wanted to brief us. Various members have mentioned the importance of the historic environment to tourism. The money that the minister announced in the statement immediately prior to this debate, which will be allocated to increase marketing for tourism, would be for naught if we did not have anything to market, and most of what we have to market is connected with our heritage.

In Edinburgh in particular, we see all year round, even at the most unlikely and least clement times of the year, people from many different countries, who are strangers to this place, coming to look at our heritage. Speaking of Edinburgh, I hope that, whatever else is said about the Holyrood project, the new building will be a significant addition to what future generations will see as this nation's and this capital city's heritage.

One of the submissions that we received was from the Scottish Civic Trust. Its at-risk register of 1,000-plus buildings includes 130 A-listed buildings and 59 B-listed buildings. Although the Historic Scotland report indicates that many hundreds of grants are given out, the at-risk figures give us all cause for significant worry. We have to ask whether sufficient commitment exists to deal with the problem, because, too often, we see stories about magnificent buildings that have been listed but that are gradually dropping into wrack and ruin because of an unwillingness or a lack of finance to fix the problem. Clearly, we do not want simply to give out blank cheques to the proprietors of such buildings, but there is a case for the issue to be addressed more specifically.

We should remember that the process of listing places constraints and potential costs on the owners of properties. There is an obligation on Government to go some way towards assisting with that. That already happens, but the list of derelict properties suggests that it does not happen to a sufficient extent. The now defunct Ancient Monuments Board for Scotland stated that

"the substantial increase in the number of scheduled monuments in Scotland ... has continued to be accompanied by deterioration in the condition of"

those monuments. The board continued:

"This would suggest that insufficient resources have been made available for ... conservation".

I agree with the board on that issue.

I am glad that landscape is included in our heritage. The minister used the word "conserve" in relation to landscape, but landscape is constantly changing. What we have in front of us today is vastly different from what was there 100 years ago. That is particularly true of farming landscape and landscape on which forestry is carried out. Certainly, the landscape is totally different from what it was 1,000 years ago. Conserving heritage does not mean changing nothing. The conservation of our landscape should not be used as an argument by the latest arrivals in some areas to object to all further change in that area, whether that is in the shape of wind farms, industrial developments or new housing.

One of the briefing documents indicates how many gallons of fuel could be obtained by converting a Victorian house into energy. I do not think that there is much chance of anyone trying to convert their house into petrol, because it would not give them very much.

16:07

John Farquhar Munro (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD): Last month, I welcomed the Executive's decision to keep Historic Scotland as an agency of the Executive. However, it is essential that the minister, Mr McAveety, follows up on his commitment to review all the functions that Historic Scotland carries out. For example, we must examine the over-rigorous restrictions that Historic Scotland imposes on the practical use of historic buildings in the modern world. The organisation seems to prefer ruins to living, working buildings.

The first example that comes to mind is Castle Tioram, which we heard about earlier. The owner of the building, with the full backing of the local community and Highland Council, wants to restore the castle to its former glory and put it into practical working use. However, Historic Scotland continues to block that and prefers an unsafe, crumbling ruin that people can view only from the

outside. Preserving our heritage does not mean putting a glass case around every historic building in its current state. Surely real preservation for the long term is about keeping buildings at the heart of their communities by restoring them to use. Restoration must be sensitive but, in the case of Castle Tioram, Historic Scotland has been found to be unaccountable and arbitrary.

If Historic Scotland had been around at the beginning of the last century, most scenic calendars of Scotland would have a blank month where the picture of Eilean Donan should be. No doubt modern restoration would have to be more authentic, but the castle shows the benefit of restoration. Hundreds of thousands of tourists call at Eilean Donan each year. It is one of the United Kingdom's biggest attractions and has a worldwide reputation.

Another historic structure that remains in daily productive use is the William Caulfield military road that goes through the Mam Ratagan from Glen Shiel to Glenelg and Arnisdale. Will the minister assure me that he will listen carefully to any calls for assistance from communities or local authorities for the preservation and maintenance of such old structures? By the way, that road has the tallest stone-arch bridge in Scotland.

Not every monument can be restored to modern use, of course. I do not propose that the Pictish brochs at Glenelg on the west coast should be converted into a timeshare, as that would be absurd. Fine examples of Scotland's particularly rich archaeology and heritage, such as the brochs, are to be found in the Highlands and Islands, where development and agriculture have not destroyed what is below the ground.

I welcome the reference in Jamie McGrigor's amendment to "archaeological tourism" and the employment potential of such activity. However, small communities do not have the physical or financial resources to promote and protect historic national assets that are slowly being lost to the ravages of wind and weather. I suggest that the Executive should encourage the responsible agencies to be much more proactive, so that our historic monuments and heritage can be preserved for future generations to enjoy.

16:11

Murray Tosh (West of Scotland) (Con): In his opening remarks, the minister identified Scotland's combination of heritage and culture as an integral part of its unique selling point. We all agree with that.

I am obliged to Dr Carol Swanson's excellent pamphlet, prepared for Scottish Environment LINK, for the information that 69 per cent of those who come to this country visit castles, houses or

gardens. Such visits are the principal reason why 30 per cent of visitors come to this country—the largest identifiable category. The minister's point is well made, therefore.

The power of our castles was made clear in the presentation given to us last week by VisitScotland, which has produced an excellent brochure, featuring heavily many of our coastal castles, particularly those along the west coast. During the minister's speech at that event last week, when my attention briefly wandered from his fine physiognomy, I noticed that one of the recurrent images on the screen behind him was of Eilean Donan, about which I will speak in a moment.

I applaud the work of Historic Scotland in conserving the heritage of the western Highlands, particularly Argyllshire, including the fine ancient castles. It is wonderful that money has been spent in recent years on the preservation of old Inverlochie Castle, for example. Places such as Castle Sween and the castles at Skipness, Dunstaffnage and Kilchurn are monuments to excellent conservation work.

Many excellent castles in the west Highlands have been preserved and restored not by the state but by private owners. John Farquhar Munro referred to Eilean Donan, which is a pastiche, in the pure terminology of the experts. It was restored from ruins in the last century, but it is probably not an entirely authentic restoration. It is one of a series of such buildings that are, essentially, reconstructions. Castle Duart on Mull is another such iconic building, although it might be much more authentic.

My opinion of Castle Tioram is rather different from that expressed by John Farquhar Munro and Jamie McGrigor. I accept that certain buildings are best preserved in their ruinous state. However, Castle Tioram is such an iconic building that I would prefer it to be preserved like Skipness Castle or Castle Sween.

Like many others, I am concerned about the situation. Roseanna Cunningham gave us a masterful summary of the briefings that we received this week from a range of environmental organisations. All the briefings referred to the erosion in real terms of the funding that is available for the restoration of buildings such as those that I have mentioned.

If the choice for Castle Tioram is between allowing it to be restored by its owner or allowing it to disintegrate and collapse so that it will not survive for another 100 years, I fully support the owner's proposed consolidation and restoration. I can scarcely think of an equivalent iconic building in Scotland that is on the brink of disintegration. If the state is genuine about the preservation of the

building in its current condition, it must be willing to make funding available, to provide guardianship and to supply the resources to ensure that an almost unique building is not lost. If the alternative to such a loss is to allow restoration, we should allow restoration to proceed on the basis of the most authentic design and study that can be made. We should also ensure that all the archaeology is retrieved.

We should not allow Castle Tioram to fall into the third category of Scottish castle—I refer to castles that have stood for 600, 700, 800 or 900 years but, according to the photographic records of the last century, are rapidly disintegrating. Hundreds of castles in that category now stand in fragmentary conditions. Who goes to Mull to see Aros Castle and who goes to see Duart Castle? Who goes to Wester Ross to look at some of the little heaps of stone that exist there and who goes to see Eilean Donan? I go to see the heaps of stone, too, but millions of people over the decades have gone to Eilean Donan. It is an iconic building and a draw for Scotland, as is Castle Tioram. I remember as a boy of 12 on holiday in the west of Scotland—on my introduction to condensation in caravans, midges and drizzling rain—being taken for a long walk one day along a track, which is now a metalled road, between Kinlochmoidart and the main road to Mallaig and coming round a corner and seeing Castle Tioram for the first time.

I do not know Lex Brown and sadly, even on the generous remuneration given to Deputy Presiding Officers, I do not have anything like his money. I could never hope to acquire and rebuild Castle Tioram, but I share his passion for it. For me it is the most devastating thought imaginable that the public sector, in which I have worked all my life and which the Parliament represents, should stand by and allow such a magnificent and iconic structure to crumble away into the sea so that my grandchildren and their grandchildren will have no opportunity to see it. Something must be done to save Castle Tioram as it is or to restore it to something like what it was. Presiding Officer, I thank you for your indulgence.

16:16

Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): Well. How can I follow that? I congratulate Murray Tosh on an excellent speech.

The minister said in his introduction that our archaeological resource was second to none. Before I continue, I declare that I have been a member of Historic Scotland and the National Trust for Scotland for some considerable time. Will the minister commit to ensuring that archaeological help is available to the planning departments of all 32 councils in Scotland? Will he also commit to ensuring that archaeology is

recognised sufficiently in the make-up of all committees that are concerned with our built environment, because I believe that there are still questions about that?

The minister made a welcome reference to developing skills, which is extremely important. Our UK Green Party manifesto states:

"Building systems should be investigated thoroughly to determine their true cost in comparison with traditional methods. Many of them are uneconomic on grounds not always immediately apparent, for instance, relying on imported components, high levels of maintenance, high running costs, etc. Their extensive use has also led to a lack of standardisation. Traditional building was, contrary to popular belief, highly standardised and dimensionally coordinated. A return to this quality of standardisation would cut down on much of the waste that is taken for granted in present building systems."

That might be something of an aside in the context of the debate, but it is an important one.

An Executive debate on the historic environment is a welcome development. Our historic environment, like the natural environment, has all too often been under-appreciated or taken for granted—many references to that have been made this afternoon. Dr Mary Baxter of Glasgow Caledonian University has commented:

"Heritage and the historic environment underpin tourism in Scotland but our research shows that it is not a priority for local authorities. It is always in the pictures of local authority plans but never in the text."

In a similar vein, the non-governmental sector historic environment review task force, of which the minister and everybody else here is well aware, commented:

"The impression that the historic environment is afforded insufficient priority within the Executive is evidenced by the fact that the sector as a whole is seriously under resourced; is managed within a box; and as a result, it is insufficiently protected, managed and maintained."

In the briefing material provided by the four organisations and umbrella organisations, the same messages have come through repeatedly. First, more information on the state of Scotland's historic environment is needed. Secondly, there is a need to address resourcing for the historic environment at all levels of government. Thirdly, community involvement, which Sylvia Jackson referred to, is an important issue in this context—community involvement with the historic environment is an under-acknowledged aspect of social inclusion.

Like the natural environment, the historic environment is all around us and its care does not fall easily within the gift of any one organisation. Many buildings, particularly those built of soft sandstone, are part of our contemporary residential and business infrastructure as well as of our historic heritage and are under threat from air pollution and vehicle emissions. To a great

extent, Scotland's wild areas are cultural landscapes and, as such, represent an overlap between the historic environment and the natural environment. A characteristic that is shared by both environments is that they are all too frequently undervalued. The importance of those environments to tourism has, thankfully, been gaining increasing recognition. We need to know how the ministerial group on tourism will deliver on its stated aim to support the sector across all portfolios.

16:20

Rhona Brankin (Midlothian) (Lab): I declare an interest, as I am a member of the board of trustees of the Scottish Mining Museum and a member of the National Trust for Scotland and the Architectural Heritage Society of Scotland. My membership of Historic Scotland has lapsed, but I will rectify that shortly.

I am pleased that we are having this debate, especially as I am the chair of the cross-party group in the Scottish Parliament on architecture and the built environment. The historic environment is hugely important to Scotland for a range of reasons. Our historic environment gives us a sense of place and identity, telling us who we are as Scots, whether we are talking about Skara Brae, the cityscapes of Edinburgh, architectural gems such as Mavisbank House in my constituency or the internationally important industrial heritage site in Newtongrange.

As has been mentioned, our historic environment is also massively important in economic terms. Tourism is Scotland's biggest industry. It employs nearly 200,000 people and brings in £4.5 billion to Scotland. We have heard about the research that shows that 83 per cent of overseas visitors come to Scotland for its historic environment, museums, galleries and heritage centres. In 2001, VisitScotland said that more people visit historic buildings than attend all the sporting events in Scotland combined, including football matches.

The historic environment is important to people. The fact that hundreds of thousands of people are members of Historic Scotland, the National Trust for Scotland, the Architectural Heritage Society of Scotland, the Scottish Civic Trust and a plethora of local heritage societies and archaeological groups shows that people are interested in finding out about the past and what their communities used to be like. In that regard, I commend Highland Council for its recent work in developing Highland archaeology week and for its support for a plethora of local archaeology groups.

Several challenges face those of us who are passionate about the historic environment. First,

there is a need to develop an understanding among our schoolchildren of the historic environment. The subject should feature in the school curriculum in primary and secondary school. Of course, it is much easier to incorporate it into the primary curriculum—there are still challenges in relation to how we can get it into the secondary curriculum. I ask the minister to consider the important role of school cultural co-ordinators in bringing together a programme of experiences and visits for schoolchildren. Children have a right to experience and access buildings that are important in relation to their local historic environment.

Secondly, although local authorities are getting better at procuring professional advice on the historic environment in relation to planning issues, many of them still fail to recognise the opportunities for community interest and tourism development. I welcome the recommendation that followed the review of Historic Scotland that that body should work with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and individual local authorities to prepare concordats or service charters setting out their respective roles and responsibilities.

The third challenge is to collect information in Scotland. I repeat the request for a review of the historic environment. We simply do not have enough facts.

There has been much debate on the historic environment and the structures and processes that are required to safeguard and promote it. I applaud the work of bodies such as Historic Scotland and I welcome the creation of the Historic Environment Advisory Council for Scotland. However, I make a plea to those people who are interested in the historic environment. Can we stop talking about structures and concentrate on delivery?

I urge members to support the motion, to reject the SNP amendment, which is characteristically negative and carping, and to support the Tory amendment. I look forward to the minister's future policy statement on the historic environment, which will build on the First Minister's St Andrew's day speech and on the national cultural strategy.

16:26

Brian Adam (Aberdeen North) (SNP): I am happy to speak in support of the SNP amendment—I am delighted by the fact that the substance of what Rhona Brankin said was so supportive of it. It would be disappointing if she and her colleagues could not accept our fairly constructive amendment rather than carping about it, especially as the debate is not particularly contentious.

As the motion states, the debate is not just about the economic well-being of the country; it is

about how our actions on the historic built environment can make a significant contribution to the general social well-being of Scots and Scotland. Other members have concentrated on individual buildings. We heard an interesting and long speech from Murray Tosh.

Murray Tosh: I would not like to be accused of concentrating on a single building; I was being mindful of the time. An equally respectable case could be made for conserving Mingary Castle in Ardnamurchan. There are also good cases for preserving old Castle Lachlan, Dunollie Castle and Innis Chonnel Castle further down in Argyllshire.

Brian Adam: I note the member's significant contribution and hope that he will pay attention when he accuses me of misusing interventions in future.

I would like to take the debate into a different area. As is well known, I am interested in genealogy and family history and in the contribution that that can make to Scotland's social well-being. Our graveyards contain significant carved stones, which make an important contribution to our historic environment, too. In some of our cities, walks around the graveyards are being developed to encourage people to take an interest in their local and family history. Some of those graveyards are well laid out and directions are given for the walks.

However, the people and professionals who have an interest in carved stones are concerned about what is happening in some of our older graveyards. Some councils have knocked over gravestones without taking appropriate and due care. That is being done in the name of health and safety, but it could lead to significant loss for professional genealogists and, more important, for people who have a personal interest in their family history.

In the process of preservation, the removal of mosses and lichens from gravestones has to be done carefully so that the stones are not damaged. There are policies on practices such as putting down stone chips on the graves to save on maintenance, because such practices can lead to significant damage to the stones. We should take a lead from those folk south of the border who have been developing policies in that area and delivering on them for some time, as Rhona Brankin said.

I commend the City of Edinburgh Council and Dundee City Council for the work that they are doing in their graveyards. I also commend the changes that have recently taken place in Aberdeen's kirk of St Nicholas, which is the town's mither kirk.

I urge the minister to take account of our graveyards. The historic environment is not just

about grand castles and battle sites; it is about all the places in Scotland where we all as Scots have an interest in our past and in our future.

16:30

Chris Ballance (South of Scotland) (Green): I echo many of Roseanna Cunningham's comments on the motion. It strikes me as quite extraordinary that members of the Labour and Liberal parties feel that this debate, which says very little about Scotland's past, with magnificent style, is more important than the debate on genetically modified maize, which we in the Green party suggest is a far more urgent issue for Scotland's present and its future. It is very sad that this debate has taken precedence over our proposed debate.

Murray Tosh: A more strategic point is that, in the five years of its existence, the Parliament has had several debates on GM crops and has been promised more. I think that we have had no other debate on our historic environment in the past five years, so today's debate is well overdue. Personally, I would have been very sorry indeed if we had sacrificed today's opportunity to discuss these issues.

Chris Ballance: I do not propose to go down that road further than the comments that I have made. However, I point out that Conservative members voted for the Green party amendment yesterday.

It is vital that we conserve the heritage of Scotland's buildings and landscape, which—as I hope the Executive is aware—face many threats. In East Lothian's current structure plan, there is the threat of 5,000 proposed new homes, which would destroy the cultural identity of the small villages around the East Lothian coast that are precisely what tourists go to see. In the Borders, 2,000 new homes are proposed in the Eildon corridor, which is the heart of Sir Walter Scott countryside. A large campaign has been organised against that development by, among others, Dame Jean Maxwell-Scott, who is Sir Walter Scott's great-great-granddaughter. It is vital that the planning authorities take on board the importance of maintaining those beautiful green spaces when they plan for the future.

Green tourism is crucial to Scotland's economy and is at the heart of a large percentage of our £4.5 billion tourism market. Our top paying attractions include Logan botanical gardens, which is a beautiful set of gardens that is one of the most popular visitor sites in the south-west of Scotland; people visit it for its beauty and for its contribution to the environment. Various Forestry Commission mountain-biking developments are also popular, such as the 7stanes mountain-biking trek, which crosses the south of Scotland. That development

has made an enormous contribution to the economy of Peebles, which has also benefited from the osprey watching development. The national parks also have an enormous contribution to make, which is why there is a campaign for a national park in Galloway.

Green tourists are high-income earners and tend to be high spenders. They are people who look for quality. Although it is sometimes pandered to, the image of the green tourist as a rather impoverished student who is looking for a green tourist trek is out of date. Today's green tourist is an older, higher-spending person who is looking for high quality in the attractions and the environment that they visit. Many German tourist coaches and organisations deal, I am told, only with organisations that are accredited under the green tourism business scheme.

Tourism needs green politics, it needs conservation, it needs the small businesses that run the vast majority of the tourist infrastructure and it needs local ownership of those small businesses. Tourism also needs biodiversity, which is, first and foremost, what attracts people to Scotland, and it needs the Scottish culture. Our tourism industry depends on Scotland's environment, Scotland's culture and Scotland's heritage. Those are the things that we have to offer and those are the things that must be at the heart of any tourism strategy and which such a strategy must protect.

16:35

Maureen Macmillan (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): I declare an interest; I actually live in an historic house. It is a B-listed building and a great delight to me. It is one of the lovely Georgian manses that were built all over Scotland about 200 years ago. I am not allowed to change the windows and I cannot add on a conservatory. If the minister is thinking of giving any money to Historic Scotland, I would accept a blank cheque any day, and I would not mind a hand with the garden too.

I want to talk a wee bit about domestic architecture in Scotland and about our Georgian heritage. It is not just in Edinburgh that we have our Georgian heritage; we have it all over the country in rural areas, especially with buildings such as manses and old farm steadings, which must be preserved. People must be encouraged and helped to look after those buildings.

We have towns that are conservation areas. In Cromarty, for example, the very fact that the town is a conservation area has meant that investment was put into its magnificent buildings before they crumbled away. We have beautiful gems of villages in Islay. I ask the minister to take a trip to

Tiree, if he can, to look at the vernacular architecture there. One of the big projects that is going on in the Highlands just now with regard to Georgian architecture is the restoration of Pultneytown in Wick, which was built by Thomas Telford. Pultneytown contains artisans' houses and workshops and is a beautiful example of the architecture of the period, but it has been sadly neglected for a long time.

How do places get prioritised? Caithness is a good example of a county that has a tremendous architectural heritage, including the prehistoric Camster Cairns, but the tourists just rush past them on their way to Skara Brae because Historic Scotland has prioritised sites and decided which ones will have an interpretive centre and which will not. I wonder how that priority is arrived at.

Many members have mentioned the castles in the west that have been restored, and I could add Stalker Castle to the list that has been given. The debate has been partly about Castle Tioram, and members have raised the issue that has angered and dismayed the community of Moidart—the refusal of Historic Scotland to countenance the restoration of the castle. If other castles have been restored, why not Tioram? It has been used by its community more than other castles that have been mentioned, the community felt ownership of it and Lex Brown bought it and offered to restore it and provide safe access. I am glad of the minister's remarks in reply to Murray Tosh's intervention, because they give me hope that all is not lost.

John Farquhar Munro and Jamie McGrigor mentioned the review of Historic Scotland, which asks ministers to deliver cultural change, to improve Historic Scotland's communication and to deliver transparency and openness, which are sorely needed. The review notes that our historic environment should play a role in social and economic policies. The restoration of Castle Tioram would have provided high-quality jobs and apprenticeships in an economically fragile area. The review states that, in planning matters,

"there is a perception that Historic Scotland acts as judge and jury in its own court."

Jamie McGrigor mentioned that, too. I believe that that reputation is well deserved.

I welcome the Executive's commitment to separate the advisory role in relation to whether a planning case should be called in from the advisory role in relation to the ministerial decision after the reporter's verdict. I understand that that advice will now be given by the planning division.

I have spoken to the Minister for Transport on numerous occasions about the impact of Historic Scotland's work on desirable projects in the Highlands, and not only with regard to medieval castles. He knows my views.

I hope that the review of Historic Scotland marks a cultural change. I urge the minister to re-examine past decisions, such as the Castle Tioram decision, which he seems to have indicated that he is prepared to do. The minister must be aware of community feeling in Moidart. The people there believe that they have been ridden roughshod over by Historic Scotland. I hope that there will be a reversal of the decision, which the community sees as the death knell of their hopes for the future of the castle as an integral part of the regeneration of the community, given the jobs that would come from restoring it and considering the number of tourists who would be drawn to accessing it, in one of the most fragile parts of Scotland.

16:40

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): I, too, wish to declare an interest—in the area where I was born and grew up, a part of which I now represent. The Borders has had a turbulent history. The towers, ruined abbeys and other sites owe their existence to war. Our common ridings are the modern manifestations of ancient struggles across and along the border in the counties of Roxburgh, Selkirk, Peebles and Berwick. The fortified walled border town of Berwick, where I was born, and the other major fortifications in those four counties, as well as the peel towers that protected Borders families and their livestock, are constant reminders of the Borders' violent history.

There is the beautiful viewpoint from the 1814 Wallace monument at Scott's view, overlooking the Eildon hills and Melrose Abbey, which today protects the heart of Robert Bruce. Any cursory look at the Roman civilisation section of the Museum of Scotland will see the collections that were found at Trimontium, or Newstead, as it is now called. Only a few miles away from there was the home of Sir Walter Scott. Painted on the canvas of the stunning, but sometimes foreboding, scenery, it is a picture that has resonated throughout the centuries. It is right that we acknowledge the contribution that the historic built environment makes to contemporary Scotland.

It is fitting that this debate comes after a statement on the tourism review, which gives us the opportunity of capitalising on the huge potential tourism market. The way forward as outlined today will allow the Borders, as a gateway to Scotland for that market, to benefit.

The debate has been genuinely interesting. Roseanna Cunningham challenged the Executive on what it is doing for the future. Only one aspect of our debate is addressed by the review of Historic Scotland, but the review is important. We need to look at the fundamentals. Does Historic

Scotland have a proper database of local historic buildings of note? I ask that question as I have recently questioned Historic Scotland's knowledge of some of the heritage in my constituency. Key to a full understanding is a strong, close relationship with local architectural and historical societies and with communities. Equally important is Historic Scotland's relationship with the Parliament.

Jamie McGrigor said that marketing will not change people's perceptions and that our history is not as attractive as catwalk models. As I represent Scotland's largest manufacturer of tartan, Lochcarron of Scotland, which is located in Galashiels and represents Scotland superbly in expanding markets abroad, I would say that Scotland's history, through Borders tartan apparel, is seen on the world's catwalks. As Donald Gorrie said, the debate is about making our history exciting. It is about benefiting economically from our past, as the minister said. I was especially pleased that the Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning, Jim Wallace, visited Lochcarron's show at the Japanese department store, Isetan, last year.

I conclude my remarks in this important and consensual debate with a simple plea: if we are to benefit more from our past in the future, we need our agencies to database the past that we have. That is a message for Historic Scotland, other agencies and Government. We have much potential, and we must ensure that we, as well as visitors to our land, enjoy it in the future.

16:44

Mr Ted Brocklebank (Mid Scotland and Fife)
(Con): I, too, have a declaration of interest, as the producer of the latest television documentary series on the National Trust for Scotland, "A Matter of Trust". Members will be pleased to note that videos of the series are available at most National Trust outlets.

Scotland's architecture and scenic heritage are vital aspects of the tourism industry, and I agree with everything that the minister and other members, such as Christine May, said about their importance. However, I also agree with Brian Adam and Maureen Macmillan; it is not only great castles that we should be talking about, but places such as the Gorbals tenements and cottages at Glamis.

The role of the National Trust for Scotland and its relationship with Historic Scotland are not always fully appreciated or integrated into the tourism product. I welcome the increase in the marketing budgets of VisitScotland and related agencies that was announced by the minister today, but many people are concerned about the apparent lack of joined-up thinking in the provision

of funding to conserve the built environment and natural heritage and the recognition of their importance to the economy. Jamie McGrigor talked about the likely closure of Kilmartin House, but other museums are also in danger. The National Trust for Scotland has come to the aid of struggling museums such as the David Livingstone Centre in Blantyre, which it now manages, but there is a limit to what it can do. I wonder how many of the 129 members of the Parliament are members of the National Trust for Scotland. Membership costs only £34 per year, which must be one of the great bargains in Scottish tourism.

I wish that I could be as complimentary about the role of Historic Scotland. We have heard about the ludicrous situation in relation to Castle Tioram, but there are other examples in which Historic Scotland appears to be a law unto itself. It is not only ancient buildings that Historic Scotland schedules for posterity. The former HMS Jackdaw is a ramshackle collection of huts and broken-down runways, situated on farmland not far from Crail in Fife. Seven years ago, Historic Scotland scheduled it as an ancient monument. The Swordfish that were stationed at HMS Jackdaw never saw a shot fired in anger, yet Historic Scotland has deemed that the 200 acres of farmland that incorporate the airfield are untouchable. The farmer cannot dig a hole on 90 per cent of his ground without the agency's permission. The site is already zoned in the local plan for development, and independent consultants are soon to begin an investigation, but no matter what the consultants report, Historic Scotland can overrule their findings.

Although the Conservatives welcome a number of the recommendations in the "Review of the Structure and Functions of Historic Scotland", we, unlike John Farquhar Munro, question whether Historic Scotland should remain an executive agency. The review states:

"there is a perception that Historic Scotland acts as judge and jury in its own court."

I note Roseanna Cunningham's point about the under-resourcing of the agency. If the Executive believes that buildings need to be preserved in the national interest, surely it should be able to fund their conservation in the way that Alasdair Morgan and others pointed out, and should not allow our built heritage to crumble into oblivion. The Conservatives firmly believe that Historic Scotland should not only highlight the historic value of a site, but should work in partnership with landowners and the local council to try to secure a sustainable future for the site. Like Murray Tosh, I have visited Castle Tioram and, sadly, I have also visited HMS Jackdaw. The contrast could not be more acute.

16:48

Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):

This debate is of historic importance, because it is a first in terms of this huge area of national heritage. Therefore, it is with some sadness that we see that the Government has not taken on board the argument that is made in the SNP's amendment. Our argument would help to fund and give new impetus to Historic Scotland; it is not a criticism of the Executive or the partnership. This is the first debate that has been held on this subject area, which requires a lot of investment. That is made obvious by the fact that there are some 46,000 listed buildings of special architectural interest in Scotland; 3,000 of those buildings are in the Highlands, which I represent. Historic Scotland controls and opens to the public only about 300 buildings, yet it controls the listing of many sites that are of major importance.

I declare an interest; as a member of the Andrew de Moray project, I submitted a petition during the first session of Parliament on this very subject. In presenting that petition to the Public Petitions Committee, I said that Historic Scotland needs

"to give greater publicity, interpretation and investment to sites and buildings of national importance".—[*Official Report, Public Petitions Committee*, 23 January 2001; c 878.]

The petition was related to the wars of independence.

The nub of the debate is that we all have our pet projects that require investment. That has been clear in the speeches of members from all parties, which suggests that it would be a good idea for the minister to rethink his attitude to what the SNP is saying and to look for ways to have the audit of our historic environment backed up by a regular review of the issue. In that way, we could have a debate on the subject in Parliament at each stage of its development.

Frank McAveety encouraged us by saying that economic development was taking place and that there was a lot of work for the construction industry. We welcome that. Just think how much more work there could be if Historic Scotland had a bigger budget. Much more work could be created from rebuilding our historic heritage. In that respect, it is interesting—no one has mentioned this point, although it may have been mentioned in questions in the past—that some of the skewing of Historic Scotland's budget has meant that, for example, £4 million has been spent on a new visitor centre at Urquhart Castle that is basically a viewing platform for the Loch Ness monster. What has that got to do with history? Has anyone established whether Urquhart Castle is an important part of our heritage, or whether some of that money ought to have been put into

interpretation, signage, car parking and access for the many sites that are far more important to the national story?

Wide questions are raised by this debate. The question of restoring ruins, which Murray Tosh posed eloquently, is very much part of the debate that goes on in local authorities. As John Duncan, who is the planning conservationist for Highland Council, has suggested, our responsibility towards our built heritage goes beyond the simple prevention of its destruction. Above all, it means ensuring that the built heritage remains in active use as an integral part of the community. That sums up many of the arguments about historic buildings that have been treated badly in the past, such as Castle Tioram and others, which require urgent attention and investment. The SNP amendment addresses that issue directly.

Roseanna Cunningham mentioned the uneven funding—underfunding, in some cases—of projects. I have mentioned some examples of that. That underpins many of the problems that have been raised in the debate, and I hope that the minister will respond to the points that have been made. Our historic environment and cultural landscape ought to excite Scots families as it did 40 or 50 years ago, when people took their children to castles and explained something about them to them. If people are to do that now, Historic Scotland, when it produces material about individual castles—for example the booklet that I am holding, which is about Bothwell Castle—must relate the story to other buildings that are part of the same story, and not just to the neighbouring properties.

The SNP asks the minister to address the point about investment; to support our amendment, as he still has the chance to do; and to recognise that we need an audit with Historic Scotland at the helm.

16:53

Mr McAveety: Many members have identified ways in which the historic environment and the landscape of Scotland are important to our tourism potential and our sense of identity as a nation, and a considerable number of points have been made. I give a guarantee that, if I do not address all those points, I shall read the *Official Report* of the debate and respond to the specific issues that members have raised.

I say to Roseanna Cunningham that, as part of the consultation programme, we will consider including Gask ridge within the Antonine wall development to ensure that its importance is recognised. I give that categorical assurance. Perth and Kinross Council was recently awarded £278,000 from the Historic Scotland budget for

2003-04, as concern was expressed about resources being made available.

The issue that was raised about Kilchurn Castle is a public safety issue. It is important to stress that access to the castle is available only across the railway line or by boat from Loch Awe-side.

Much of the debate has centred on the role that people and organisations play and, as a result, Historic Scotland has featured in many speeches. However, as I said in my opening speech, although Historic Scotland is important in setting guidelines, establishing the framework for development and making available grants, support and expertise, local authorities and other agencies also have a role to play. We need to find more effective ways of addressing the issue and the review of Historic Scotland recommended that we consider how we can work with different partners. In fact, one of the Historic Environment Advisory Council for Scotland's key objectives is to examine ways in which local authorities can play a much more central role in developments across Scotland.

We have already increased Historic Scotland's budget from £59.7 million to £65 million in 2005-06 and, over the past 10 years, the organisation has substantially increased the income that it has been able to generate from £6 million to £19 million.

As far as buildings at risk are concerned, I have asked HEACS to consider a review of existing protection systems and I hope to receive its recommendations and views in the very near future. We have supported the development of the at-risk register, which is now online and will ensure that much more information is available to identify buildings that are at risk. Moreover, I have asked HEACS to review the decision on whether there should be an audit on this matter. Again, I await the council's views and hope to address the issue at some point.

On the planning issues that members raised, I will meet the minister with responsibility for planning, Margaret Curran, to find out how we can tackle such matters. However, I guarantee that, on Historic Scotland's review of Castle Tioram, which members throughout the chamber have mentioned, and the public local inquiry that took place in 2001—[*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): Order. I am sorry, minister. There is too much of a buzz in the chamber and backs are being turned to the minister again. I ask members to show some respect.

Mr McAveety: Thank you for that protection, Presiding Officer.

We do not want Castle Tioram to disintegrate; indeed, we want to work towards consolidation

and 24/7 public access to the building. However, as I need to discuss the matter with other members who have raised the issue with me, I would prefer to wait until I have had those discussions than to address the matter directly this afternoon.

In light of the review, we have considered separating Historic Scotland's roles to remove the perception that the organisation is the judge and jury of planning applications. The review advised that PLI reporters' recommendations should be made to the planning division of the Scottish Executive Development Department. As a result, Historic Scotland would no longer have the direct role that members have claimed it has.

Historic Scotland has received a total of 65 green tourism awards, including 16 gold awards. We certainly want to encourage such developments.

As far as gravestones are concerned, we have set out best practice guidance that highlights ways in which those with responsibility for graveyards can address the problem. Moreover, Historic Scotland staff are available for consultation. If members are really seeking excitement, a conference is being held this weekend on the very matter. I recommend that Brian Adam attend that conference.

With regard to the broader issue of local authorities, we have established city heritage trusts which I hope will develop much more partnership working. We want to acknowledge the role that island, rural and urban councils across Scotland can play, therefore HEACS has been asked to examine ways of working in partnership with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities on the matter. We want to establish good practice to ensure that people can take on board experience elsewhere in Scotland.

Some members raised the key point of direct grant consent. I clarify for the benefit of members that Historic Scotland does not grant consent; instead, it considers proposals to grant consent by planning authorities. Each year, it handles more than 2,500 applications and deals with 97% of them within 28 days. Furthermore, fewer than 10 of those applications are called in each year for determination by Scottish ministers. In the past five years, Historic Scotland has received 1,000 formal applications for scheduled monument consent, only five of which have been rejected. Obviously, those applications attract public attention. They are certainly contentious, but perhaps that is why they were called in.

I will conclude with two important points. Historic Scotland is committed to working with local produce to ensure that the kind of product that Donald Gorrie mentioned is an exemplary, quality

product. We have product brands such as “Made in Orkney”, “Made in Tayside” and “Made in Iona and Mull” and we are developing a “Made in the Borders” brand. We are developing all those brands across our historical sites.

We recognise that the debate on the historical environment is important. Unlike one or two members who were curmudgeonly about the nature of the debate, I am delighted that we have had the chance to discuss the issues. I believe that a number of important issues have been identified. I assure members that if I have not responded to points that they raised during the debate, I will respond to them later.

Decision Time

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid):

There are 15 questions to be put as a result of today's business.

Before we move to the first vote, I remind members that, in relation to the debate on pensioner poverty, if amendment S2M-1020.3, in the name of Mary Mulligan, is agreed to, amendment S2M-1020.2, in the name of Shona Robison, and amendment S2M-1020.1, in the name of Murdo Fraser, are pre-empted; and in relation to the debate on cold-related deaths, if amendment S2M-1021.2, in the name of Mary Mulligan, is agreed to, amendment S2M-1021.1, in the name of Tricia Marwick, is pre-empted.

The first question is, that amendment S2M-1020.3, in the name of Mary Mulligan, which seeks to amend motion S2M-1020, in the name of John Swinburne, on pensioner poverty, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)

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)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Raffan, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

AGAINST

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
 Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)

ABSTENTIONS

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)

Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 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)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 74, Against 23, Abstentions 23.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: Amendments S2M-1020.2 and S2M-1020.1 are pre-empted.

The second question is, that motion S2M-1020, in the name of John Swinburne, on pensioner poverty, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)

MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 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)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Raffan, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

AGAINST

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)

ABSTENTIONS

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)

Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Kane, Rosie (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
 Lochhead, Richard (North East 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)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 74, Against 18, Abstentions 29.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Parliament agrees that pensioner poverty must be eradicated and congratulates the Scottish Executive for closing the opportunity gap for Scotland's poorest pensioners; welcomes Executive policies that are helping pensioners to save money on heating their homes effectively, providing assistance with bus fares and continuing free personal and nursing care, and supports the Executive in encouraging pensioners to claim benefits that are rightfully theirs, such as council tax benefit, through the central heating programme, and through disseminating information to local authorities and old people's organisations.

The Presiding Officer: The third question is, that amendment S2M-1021.2, in the name of Mary Mulligan, which seeks to amend motion S2M-1021, in the name of John Swinburne, on cold-related deaths, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 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)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 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)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 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)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Raffan, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

AGAINST

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
 Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kane, Rosie (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)

Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)

ABSTENTIONS

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (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)
 Lochhead, Richard (North East 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)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 67, Against 30, Abstentions 24.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: Amendment S2M-1021.1 is pre-empted.

The next question is, that motion S2M-1021, in the name of John Swinburne, on cold-related deaths, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 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)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 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)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 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)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McMahan, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Raffan, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

AGAINST

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)

ABSTENTIONS

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)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Kane, Rosie (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
 Lochhead, Richard (North East 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)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 67, Against 17, Abstentions 37.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Parliament notes the recent figures on winter cold-related deaths; recognises the decrease by half in the number of fuel-poor households in Scotland; welcomes the Scottish Executive's extension of the central heating programme to upgrade or replace partial or inefficient central heating systems for the over-80s in the private sector, and reaffirms the commitment to eradicate fuel poverty as far as reasonably practicable by 2016 thereby combating the threat of winter cold-related deaths.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S2M-984.2, in the name of Tavish Scott, which seeks to amend motion S2M-984, in the name of Tommy Sheridan, on the council tax, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)

Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
 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)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 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)
 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, 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)
 Raffan, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)

Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

AGAINST

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Kane, Rosie (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
 Lochhead, Richard (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 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)
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 88, Against 33, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S2M-984, in the name of Tommy Sheridan, on the council tax, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
 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)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
 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)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (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)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 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)
 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, 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)
 Raffan, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)

Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

AGAINST

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Kane, Rosie (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
 Lochhead, Richard (North East 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)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 91, Against 30, Abstentions 0.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Parliament agrees that the forthcoming independent review of local government finance should be asked to conduct a thorough examination of a range of local taxation systems, including the various proposals for an income-based system and reforms to the present council tax system and encourages all those who wish to make meaningful contribution to the review to submit proposals when called upon to do so.

The Presiding Officer: Before putting the questions on the next debate, I should point out that, under rule 11.4.2, questions on amendments must be put in the order in which the amendments were moved. In this case—unusually—the Conservative amendment was moved before the Executive amendment, so I must put the question on it first.

The question is, that amendment S2M-985.1, in the name of Lord James Douglas-Hamilton, which

seeks to amend motion S2M-985, in the name of Carolyn Leckie, on nursery nurses, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)

AGAINST

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)

Kane, Rosie (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 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)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 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)
 Raffan, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

ABSTENTIONS

Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 17, Against 103, Abstentions 1.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S2M-985.2, in the name of Euan Robson, which seeks to amend motion S2M-985, in the name of Carolyn Leckie, on nursery nurses—a just claim, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 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)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 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)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (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, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Raffan, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (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, Iain (North East Fife) (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)

AGAINST

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) (Ind)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Kane, Rosie (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
 Lochhead, Richard (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 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)
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)
 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)
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

Abstentions

Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 70, Against 44, Abstentions 3.

Amendment agreed to.

Carolyn Leckie (Central Scotland) (SSP): Sell-out!

The Presiding Officer: Order. I do not welcome comments during decision time.

The next question is, that motion S2M-985, in the name of Carolyn Leckie, on nursery nurses—a just claim, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 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)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (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)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (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, 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)
 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)
 Raffan, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (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, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)
 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)

AGAINST

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) (Ind)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Kane, Rosie (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
 Lochhead, Richard (North East 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)
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)
 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)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

ABSTENTIONS

Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 76, Against 41, Abstentions 4.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Parliament recognises the importance of the pre-five sector to securing the best possible start to life for Scotland's young people and the priority the Scottish Executive has given to pre-five provision; welcomes the significant progress in pre-school education entitlement for three and four-year-olds achieved over recent years; emphasises that nursery nurses and others in the early years workforce should receive pay that is fair to them and is financially sustainable; notes grading settlements made to date; urges COSLA to do all it can to support a resolution to the current dispute; further urges the local authority employers and unions to continue negotiations, and encourages the Executive to push forward with plans to secure improved workforce planning, qualifications structure and career pathways for the early years workforce as a means of securing recognition of the commitment and professionalism of pre-five workers, greater opportunities and equality in the workplace for this predominantly female workforce.

The Presiding Officer: The next question—*[Interruption.]* Order. I ask people to leave the gallery quietly. I do not want to have to clear the public gallery.

The next question is, that amendment S2M-1033.2, in the name of Roseanna Cunningham, which seeks to amend motion S2M-1033, in the name of Frank McAveety, on the historic environment—a valuable resource for Scotland, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
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) (Ind)
Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
Kane, Rosie (Glasgow) (SSP)
Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
Lochhead, Richard (North East 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)

Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)
Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)
Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)
Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)
Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

AGAINST

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)
Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
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)
Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
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)
McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)

Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Raffan, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 54, Against 62, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S2M-1033.1, in the name of Jamie McGrigor, which seeks to amend motion S2M-1033, in the name of Frank McAveety, on the historic environment—a valuable resource for Scotland, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: [Interruption.] Order. The final question is, that motion S2M-1033, in the name of Frank McAveety, on the historic environment—a valuable resource for Scotland, as amended, be agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Parliament recognises that Scotland's rich heritage of historic buildings, conservation areas, monuments, archaeology, gardens and landscapes makes an important contribution to the cultural, economic and social well-being of contemporary Scotland and believes that Historic Scotland, in its policies, must be mindful of the immense benefits to employment, income and culture brought by tourism and, in particular, art and archaeological tourism.

Maternity Services (Caithness)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh):

The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S2M-746, in the name of Rob Gibson, on maternity services in Caithness. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament notes the current review of maternity services in rural and remote communities of Caithness and north Sutherland; believes that no "one size fits all" model will deliver satisfactory solutions across the country; considers that staff shortages and widely differing geographical circumstances have to be accommodated, and further considers that the Scottish Executive should instruct NHS Scotland to draw up consultant contracts so that medical staff gain competencies in both large and small hospitals and therefore fulfil the Executive's pledge that every child in Scotland be given the best possible start in life.

17:16

Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): It is timely that this debate on maternity services in Caithness should take place this evening, as the Calder report has just been published and Highland NHS Board will meet in Wick next Tuesday to discuss the outcome of proposals that would, in effect, downgrade maternity services in Wick and Caithness general hospital.

It is with great sadness that I read the first line in the executive summary of the report, which states:

"The provision of specialist obstetric care at Caithness General Hospital is unsatisfactory to the extent of being unsafe in the view of obstetricians currently working in the Highland Region."

That should be set against Mary Mulligan's statement when the expert group on acute maternity services—EGAMS—report was first published. She said:

"Giving every child in Scotland the best possible start in life is a top priority for the Scottish Executive."

If we are to resolve the issue of providing for people in the far-flung parts of Scotland who live in a geography that has been fixed and who rely on the Government to equalise its expenditure to make services work, Caithness has an extremely strong case. We must meet the needs of patients where they live and ensure that some form of consultant-led maternity service is maintained there. I believe that the many people who will watch the webcast of this debate expect the Parliament to ensure that the Executive provides a service that meets those needs.

Professor Calder reports against a background of low and decreasing birth numbers in the Caithness area, recruitment difficulties and wanting the delivery of the best possible services

that modern medicine can offer in small hospitals. Therefore, it is necessary for Highlands and Islands representatives to ask how we will provide the services that are needed in areas such as that in question, where there are 100 miles between the small Caithness hospital and Raigmore general hospital. How will we deal with such situations?

Professor Calder describes the situation in Caithness as being more acute than in any other part of Scotland. That said, we could find that the birth rate in Caithness increases in the future. We know that the birth rate in the countryside is better than it is in many cities. Indeed, if there were to be a dispersal of Government jobs and good reasons for people to stay in Caithness, many young families would want to bring up their children there, if they could. Many people who want to set up businesses want to know that a full service will be available in the area. Such a service attracts people to set up businesses in Caithness. If that service is put in jeopardy, there could be an economic downturn. I am delighted that Highland Council and Highlands and Islands Enterprise are doing an assessment that will give us an idea of the social and economic effects of the reduction in health services in our area.

The nub of the issue are the staff who would be recruited to work in maternity services. On the EGAMS report, Mary Mulligan said:

"We need to realise the full potential of our midwives ... We need to think across professional ... and organisational boundaries".

I will dwell on those matters, which are at the heart of the argument.

We are used to the fact that not enough doctors are trained. The difficulty in obtaining consultants occurs in many countries, as well as in Scotland. It is a great difficulty in modern medicine, because of the way in which specialisation takes place, but we are asking for some out-of-the-box thinking. We are asking that consultants should be employed on a contract that allows them to keep up their competencies in a large hospital, such as in Inverness, and work in Caithness.

Midwives have said that they want to have more responsibilities. Since around two thirds of births ought to be reasonably uncomplicated, they could take on such responsibilities. However, examples flow from many other places to suggest that there must be consultant back-up when emergency caesarean operations are required. Professor Calder's report does not say how that should be delivered. It is mentioned, but the solution has to be found. It involves consultants working in Caithness who do not just deal with out-patients, and who have the skills to deal with the emergencies that can crop up.

Much play has been made of the distance from the hospital in Inverness. Rightly, the people of Caithness and north Sutherland feel that road journeys for expectant mums—over bad roads in what can be bad weather—should be deplored. If we were working in other countries, we might expect there to be more aircraft, such as helicopters, but we do not have the investment in those facilities in Caithness and the north. For example, we do not have a commitment to mend the second runway at Wick airport, so that aircraft can work in different weathers.

Above all, we do not have a commitment to get consultants to move to and work in Caithness, or to fly them in. It takes half an hour to set up a theatre for an operation and it takes half an hour to fly from Inverness to Caithness, so why not make it a central part of our argument for the future of maternity services in Caithness that services are consultant-led and that consultants are flown in as and when needed? Not every operation will require that, but people want to see that spelled out, and want to know what the minister is going to do to address the issues of geography and need that we face in the north of Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I have a very long list of members who wish to speak in the debate, so I ask for speeches to be kept to three minutes. I will review later whether we need to extend the debate.

17:23

Maureen Macmillan (Highlands and Islands (Lab): I am grateful to Rob Gibson for lodging the motion, which I fully support.

Many of us in the chamber have spent a lot of time lobbying for the retention of the present services in Caithness. The review of maternity services has caused great anxiety to the community. Understandably, people are angry about the threat to their consultant-led maternity services. The position is fairly dire. Three consultant obstetricians delivered the service in Wick, but now those consultants have all left and Highland NHS Board is endeavouring to find temporary replacements until a decision is made about the future of the service. The situation is unsatisfactory, because it is impossible to attract consultants to a service that might not exist in a few months' time.

Professor Calder's review of maternity services has done much to dash hopes. He talked about why consultants are in short supply and the small number of confinements at Wick. We know that we have challenges to overcome. He says that the challenges mean that the hospital does not attract the right calibre of consultants, but surely there are ways in which we can attract the right calibre of

person. For example, Professor Calder noted that there are no opportunities for continuing professional development and a lack of evidence of any on-going medical audit or appraisal for revalidation. Questions must be asked of Highland Acute Hospitals NHS Trust about the level of support that has been given to the Wick consultants. How can it be that when the first review was carried out two years ago, the consultants were content with the service and said that it was safe, whereas now, two years later, there is a huge question mark over the service? Something has fallen down a black hole in the past two years and I want to know what it is.

If clinicians feel that the present service is not safe, we must make it safe, perhaps, as Rob Gibson said, by encouraging Wick and Inverness to work together more closely to retain the consultant service. We must also consider how the obstacles to recruitment can be addressed and whether we can enhance the professional experience for consultants at Wick by rotating them regularly with Raigmore staff. The key question is: what are the clinicians in Raigmore prepared to do to support the Wick maternity unit? In the end, it will be up to the clinicians in Raigmore to say that they will go up to Wick. Because of the consultants' contracts, we cannot force them to do that, which means that we must try to get their support.

As we are all aware, if there are no locally based consultants, complications in labour or fears for the health of a baby result in an arduous journey to Raigmore, which is 100 miles away. We do not need to rehearse the arguments on that issue—we know what the roads are like. Professor Calder pointed out that, as it is configured, the air-ambulance service would not be much quicker than going to Raigmore by road. We cannot have that. As Rob Gibson said, we must consider basing an enhanced air-ambulance service in the north. We must ensure that there is close working between Raigmore and Wick to deliver the service that the people of Wick want.

17:27

Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): I congratulate Rob Gibson on securing the debate and I associate myself entirely with his remarks. The minister will be aware of the arguments about distance and inclement weather and so on, which members of all parties have made. That is an important point to which I will return.

Mr Gibson is absolutely right to say that we need to think outside the box. Professor Calder has produced a report that is factually correct in strictly logical and medical terms, but when one places this vital service in the wider contexts of economic

development, geography and the weather, one realises that a much broader view must be taken. It is no accident that the Scottish Enterprise network and Highland Council have come out courageously on the issue. The convener of Highland Council, Mrs Alison Magee, has resigned from Highland NHS Board over the issue. That demonstrates amply that responsible individuals in local government and the Scottish Enterprise network appreciate the gravity of the situation that is being thrust upon us.

The minister will hear the same message from members of all political parties, which is an unusual and precious thing in the Parliament. Members who have met people in Caithness, including Rob Gibson, Maureen Macmillan and I, have always heard the same message and sung from the same hymn sheet. We have stood together on the issue. Given that the united front extends throughout the Parliament, we are talking about the will of Parliament on the issue.

Ministers must consider the issue in the wider context. Highland Acute Hospitals NHS Trust will consider Professor Calder's report and I should not be surprised if it decides that the proposals are exactly what it wants.

Maureen Macmillan: Does Jamie Stone agree that, as has been done in Lochaber, a solutions group that includes representatives of the community and the medical profession should be set up to consider the issue?

Mr Stone: That suggestion is entirely appropriate and we should forge ahead with it.

The issue is of such gravity and will affect people's lives; in fact, it will endanger lives. Rob Gibson's point about the cross runway at Wick is correct, as is Professor Calder's point about flights. We cannot gainsay the distance to Inverness. What if the A9 is blocked when somebody is being taken there? Rob Gibson's idea of having a rotating system whereby consultants who work in Raigmore also work in the small hospitals is entirely sensible.

Mr David Sedgwick, a consultant in Fort William, has demonstrated that the consultants there are doing useful other work outside their own fields. Mr Sedgwick is doing small operations such as the removal of small benign lumps. Such multiskilling is the way forward for the future.

I will conclude my remarks, as I do not have much time remaining. I thank Mary Scanlon for giving way in my favour. I remind the minister that I do not doubt that this is the single biggest issue that Rob Gibson, Maureen Macmillan and I have faced in the far north of Scotland. I ask the minister to consider the matter seriously. It should be placed on the Cabinet agenda because it cuts across other ministerial responsibilities and could

fly in the face of many of the good things that we are trying to do in the Scottish Parliament.

17:30

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):

I will refer to Professor Calder's independent review of maternity services, which was published this week. There were 570 births in Caithness general hospital in 1966, but that figure had decreased to 224 by 2003, with another 133 births in Inverness in that year. There are likely to be 112 births in the midwifery-led unit in 2004. I worry that in 2006, we will analyse the number of births and ask whether the unit is viable.

Professor Calder's report states that the review visit and

"subsequent developments have reinforced the strength of local feeling and have persuaded the Review Group that there is probably no issue currently of greater concern to the people of Caithness and Sutherland."

I hope that the minister takes that point on board tonight.

I will discuss section 6 of the review. I was under the impression that consultants who work at Caithness general hospital spend two or three days each month at Raigmore hospital. I was told a couple of years ago at one of our regular meetings with NHS Highland that such visits took place to give the consultants the opportunity to maintain their skills and training and to learn about new technologies. I do not know whether such visits have stopped.

The section of the review dealing with midwifery issues states that although the midwives at Caithness are positive about the future,

"they did raise some concerns",

including

"Reservations regarding safety if no obstetrician is available ... Specialist help more than 100 miles away ... Potential for no resident obstetric cover ... Issues of transfer, retrieval and transport."

If the midwives remain concerned about the recommendations in the report, I will remain concerned and the local population will remain concerned. Assistance must be sought from 100 miles away. If there were such problems in the minister's constituency, mothers in Edinburgh would have to travel to Carlisle, Newcastle or Aberdeen. I invite him to think about that.

An important point is made in the report's conclusion, which states:

"We believe that the preferred configuration should be the Community Maternity Unit model and that it should be developed under the following stringent conditions".

I will not list all the conditions, but it is enough to say that six of them include the phrase "should be"

and the other one includes the word "must". If the community maternity unit model is chosen, many questions will remain unanswered and many commitments will not have been met.

17:34

Eleanor Scott (Highlands and Islands) (Green): I thank Rob Gibson for lodging this motion. It was good to read Professor Calder's report in advance. Jamie Stone said that there is cross-party agreement on this issue. I think there is—because we recognise the legitimate aspiration of the people of Caithness to have a sustainable, quality service in their community.

I would like to be somewhat more positive about the report than other members have been. As I recently worked in NHS Highland, I know about recruitment problems. There is nothing worse than a service that exists on paper but does not exist on the ground because posts cannot be filled.

I will not quote extensively from Professor Calder's report, although it has some interesting aspects. The decline in popularity of obstetrics as a specialty for new medical graduates reflects societal changes. We are more litigation minded and medicine has become more defensive as a result. Medical professionals feel a bit more under threat and a bit more under scrutiny. It is regrettable that that makes a unit such as the current Caithness general hospital obstetrics service unviable. Professor Calder also points out that the unit at Caithness is a specialist unit only in so far as it has three consultant obstetricians. There is a lot of back-up that it does not have, such as neonatal intensive care facilities.

I mean no offence, but Rob Gibson's idea of a flying squad is a little naive. There will not be a plane waiting on the tarmac. It might take only half an hour to fly to Caithness, but the flight still has to be organised. There will not be a pilot waiting, so it would take a lot more than half an hour to get someone there. What we need is not to fly people up to Caithness, but careful selection of cases so that does not have to happen. There is no point having emergency services to deliver babies when there are no neonatal intensive care facilities. We might be able to sort out the mum, but what happens to the baby when there are no paediatricians or neonatal intensive care nurses? I do not think that the suggestion is on.

I feel fairly positive about the Calder report, because it suggests a way forward. I agree that the service should be consultant led; I just do not think that the consultants who are leading are necessarily going to be on the ground all the time. The model of their helping with the assessment of patients to determine which ones are suitable for delivering in Caithness and which should travel to

a specialist facility is good. I believe that that model is followed in other areas, such as Orkney, so it could be followed in Caithness. I suspect that people will not like it, but they would like it even less if we tried to keep obstetrician consultants in Caithness but were unable to fill the posts, which I suspect would continue to be the case, and in the meantime did not do what Professor Calder says we must do to make a midwife unit viable. There are training issues to consider as well as other issues about support. We should address those issues and not pretend to be running something we just do not have.

17:37

Jim Mather (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I congratulate Rob Gibson on securing the opportunity to debate this crucial issue. From what we have heard tonight it is clear that the proposed centralisation of maternity services and the closure of the consultant-led service in Caithness can have only adverse effects, the most compelling of which is that it will undoubtedly place at risk the lives of mothers and their newborn children.

The Calder report applies a centralist logic that would be fair only if Caithness had been given a fair chance to compete and build both its economy and population, but that was never the case; no such chance was ever forthcoming. The Executive culture of centralisation is liable to centralise more than it bargained for: it is liable to reduce inexorably the population of Caithness at a faster rate than ever before when any Government should be trying to achieve the entirely opposite effect.

The Registrar General for Scotland's data on young economically active people show that he is forecasting a loss from Scotland of 270,000 economically active people in the next 23 years. Given that the greater conurbations of Glasgow, Edinburgh, Dundee, Aberdeen and Inverness can be expected to grow in that period, those data mean that there will be a disproportionately heavy blow to the smaller towns of Scotland, such as Wick, Fort William and Oban. It is clear from the campaigns that we have seen that people see the threat.

Mr Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab): Will the member give way?

Jim Mather: No. I have only three minutes.

And that is why the people of Caithness, Lochaber, Lorn and the isles have united to bring about a change of culture. It is a stand worth making. After all, under successive Governments in my lifetime, the economically active population has fallen, particularly in the north.

Maureen Macmillan: Will the member give way?

Jim Mather: I have only a minute left.

A further reduction in population is not acceptable, nor is the prospect that the new European accession states could push us further down an extended life-expectancy league table. That is why we need to demand change and latitude verging on what might be called unreasonable in some quarters. It is arguable that in the past we have been too reasonable, too accommodating and too willing to accept the unacceptable by being too trusting of the powers that be. The results do not justify that trust.

Strenuous opposition is the only option. We know that the only thing that ever forces a change of heart on the part of Government is its being confronted by an argument that exposes the weakness of its position. Surely we must say no to centralisation and yes to proper services that attract investment, encourage people to stay and justify more job relocation that could fuel the process of recovery. That is what we need from the study, as well as the recognition that consultant-led services are a crucial component in any competitive proposition.

In *The Herald* today, Professor Calder said that the provision of specialist obstetric services was

"Unsatisfactory to the point of being unsafe".

My proposition is that the withdrawal of those services would be unsafe for the economy and the community and detrimental to social cohesion.

17:40

Carolyn Leckie (Central Scotland) (SSP): I agree that the withdrawal of obstetric cover in Wick will definitely be unsafe. The degree to which it will be unsafe should be quantified, but that has not been examined. I join all members present who are sticking up for Wick, but I will also stick up for maternity services in general. There needs to be a rethink. All maternity services are suffering from a lack of planning and a lack of advanced resources to deal with the consultant contract and recruitment and retention problems, all of which could have been foreseen, planned for and avoided.

Mary Scanlon referred to the concerns that have been raised about midwifery. It distresses me that those concerns are merely noted as bullet points in the Calder report and that there is no explanation of the background, no details of the concerns and no explanation of how they might be addressed. As a result, the concerns remain outstanding: there has been no reassurance about how they will be dealt with.

I do not have time to cover all my concerns about midwifery, so I will pick just one. It involves a woman whose pregnancy and delivery are normal and whose baby is fine, but who retains her placenta. That cannot be predicted. Even if she and the baby remain safe and well and the only impact on her of there being no consultant to deal with the situation is that she has to transfer to Inverness or Raigmore, the consequences socially and emotionally in terms of the establishment of the bond between the mother, father, child and other relatives are not acceptable. For example, transferring the mother to another hospital would have dire consequences for the establishment of breastfeeding, which is supposed to be an Executive priority.

The report says:

"In particular there is a fear that a reduced requirement for emergency anaesthetic provision could impact on the job satisfaction of the anaesthetists"

and notes that it would then become increasingly difficult to recruit and retain such specialists and that

"these specialties are themselves already facing the same types of pressures as confront the obstetric service."

In other words, the report accepts that it is inevitable that anaesthetists will be lost as well. The loss of maternity services will result in the loss of anaesthetic services, which will threaten the future of Caithness general hospital. The hospital is in great peril and the report implicitly accepts that.

The report also says:

"It is now accepted that to provide a rota of round the clock on call duties will in future require at least eight and ideally ten individuals."

As I said earlier, that could have been foreseen. The people of Wick will suffer as a result of that lack of planning and resourcing.

There are ways around the problem. We need to come at the situation from a different angle. Rather than simply accept the situation and say that Caithness hospital will have to close, we and the clinicians should assert that it is imperative, for the good of the economy and for the good of mothers and babies in Wick and Caithness, that there is a full maternity service in Wick—and get to grips with how we propose to deliver it.

17:44

John Farquhar Munro (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD): I fully support the campaign to retain Wick hospital. However, the problem is pronounced and not localised in Caithness and north-west Sutherland. Many areas of the Highlands and Islands have experienced a creeping, steady reduction in all sections of

medical provision, particularly in areas that are remote from the central hospitals. That reduction in service applies not only to maternity and midwifery services but encroaches on almost all existing rural medical provision, which is slowly but surely being centralised at the main hospital in Inverness—to the detriment of existing rural provision.

The centralisation of provision, which is a continual pressure to downgrade hospitals throughout Scotland, will doubtless damage rural medical services. It might also prove to be damaging to the economic potential of those areas. The economic development of an area is not based solely on investing money. To grow an economy, we need public services such as health, education and transport.

As we know, the Executive is trying to develop Scotland's economic potential by encouraging people to come and live and work in Scotland through its fresh talent programme, but moves to downgrade the hospitals in Wick, Fort William and Oban will prove to be a barrier to that initiative.

There is no doubt in my mind that if Wick is downgraded, the lives of mothers and children will be put at risk because they will be forced to travel more than 100 miles to Raigmore hospital. Recently, a young woman from Skye lost her baby and her own life was severely threatened because she needed to travel to Inverness for emergency care. A helicopter was ordered. It picked her up at the hospital in Skye seven hours later. We can enthuse about the helicopter service, but that is no service at all.

I stress that we need to retain and expand medical provision at a more local level so that our general practitioners and their patients can feel secure and confident in medical services in rural communities.

17:47

Dr Jean Turner (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind): I thank Rob Gibson for bringing the debate to the chamber. As members have said, consultant-led services are diminishing all over Scotland. We cannot possibly sustain communities if they do not have medical services, including general medical services and general practitioners.

No matter how good GPs and midwives are, they love to know that if they get into difficulties, they can call upon consultants who are more specialised. It is up to the doctors, the colleges and anyone who is thinking about such services not to withdraw those services but to find out how they can get round the need to withdraw them. It is imperative that paediatricians, obstetricians and

anaesthetists rotate and stay overnight in places such as Caithness.

Weather plays a part when we think about the north of Scotland. I trained in Aberdeen and I was a full-time anaesthetist for eight years. Once I went out in an ambulance from Aberdeen to Dufftown behind a snowplough to attend a lady who had a normal pregnancy. We expect such people to deliver safely in any community; her placenta was retained and we had to go out there to try to retrieve it, but there were difficulties and we ended up having to bring her and her baby safely back to Aberdeen behind the snowplough. Everything went well.

A hospital anaesthetist working in obstetrics sees the worst side of obstetrics: things can go wrong very quickly. Everything can be going along all right, then the staff might find that they have about three minutes to get their heads round what they are going to have to do and get into theatre. If they have to wait for helicopters, aeroplanes or ambulances, they might as well forget it; they will have lost the case.

We have to sustain our communities and get our doctors and the royal colleges to accept that doctors must rotate and stay overnight in those remote communities. It is up to the profession. It should be ashamed, and so should a country that cannot look after its people. We are never going to get people to work and live in Caithness, or even beyond Vale of Leven, if they do not have general medical services and maternity services.

17:49

Mr Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab): I appreciate the opportunity that I have been given—thanks to Rob Gibson's motion—to spend a couple of minutes speaking about Scotland's maternity services. I am here to remind members that the issue affects not only rural areas but every area in Scotland.

Of course, we all know that we are culpable, because we all joined the campaign to reduce doctors' hours. Who was against reducing junior doctors' hours? I see no hands going up. Which members of the Health Committee were against improving general practitioner and consultant contracts? None of us. However, we failed to secure the flexibility within those contracts that would allow us maximum access to services. What depresses me and frustrates me as a politician is that we have not tackled that issue over the past few months and years.

The minister needs to take into consideration the need for active engagement of consultants. The Rankin maternity unit was closed down not by Malcolm Chisholm but by the consultants who informed the health board that they could no

longer sustain a safe service. The same happened to the Vale of Leven hospital. We all get emotional about that, but it is very dangerous to go down the road of allowing politicians to instruct clinicians about what is and is not safe.

Eleanor Scott set a commendable example—although it might be quiet in at least one household tonight—by putting the case from the clinical perspective. However, too few clinicians have been prepared to do that. During Argyll and Clyde NHS Board's consultation on maternity services, which went on for years, not one consultant was prepared to turn up at any of the meetings. They were not prepared to face the public and to explain that as well as receive an increase in wages they would work fewer weekends and that services would have to be centralised as a result.

We need to tackle that issue and I hope that the cross-party Health Committee will provide us with an opportunity to rally to that challenge. If we do, it will be the first time Parliament has done that. Carolyn Leckie was right that Parliament has had four years to tackle the planning issues in the national health service that we all knew were coming, but we neglected to look at them. The Health and Community Care Committee did not consider those issues at all, but the Health Committee is now beginning to consider them. The horse might have bolted—I concede that we may be chasing it—but I hope that we will be given the opportunity to get clinical opinion to join the debate that needs to take place. I also hope that we can bring out these people who call themselves the "royal colleges". We need to find out not only who they are but what decisions they make, when those decisions are made and what impact they have on our communities.

17:53

Mrs Margaret Ewing (Moray) (SNP): I will be brief because I am conscious of time constraints. Like others, I congratulate Rob Gibson on bringing the issue before us and I am delighted at the consensus that we have heard tonight. That shows the importance with which we regard our communities in Scotland.

As a regular attender at members' business debates, I know that we often concentrate on many specific health issues, but today's debate is on a particularly important dimension. Over the years, Scotland's national health service has had a strong centralising philosophy of providing centres of excellence in the big cities and of closing down small units in rural areas and in the suburbs of our cities. However, people want good local services. Rob Gibson's motion does not demand that heart transplants or brain surgery be available in Wick; rather, it asks for services to

support one of the most basic events of life—the birth of children.

Picking up on Jean Turner's reference to Dufftown, I had to fight against the closure of hospitals such as the Turner memorial hospital. Grampian Health Board's philosophy was that every maternity unit in Moray would have to close and that people would have to travel to Aberdeen. The campaign that was run in Moray was opposed by many of those who sat in their ivory towers in Aberdeen. They paid no attention to the strength of our arguments, which came from the whole community and from all the political parties in the area. We have to examine the centralising philosophy that exists so that we do not lose many more of our rural community hospitals.

I do not think that we sell hard enough the advantages of living and working in some of the most spectacularly beautiful parts of our country, where there are good school facilities and all the rest of it. That is the way to retain and attract people, but they will not come unless units such as the one that we are debating exist.

I think that it was Maureen Macmillan who said that although there are challenges, they can be overcome. We did that in Moray. We have attracted the obstetricians and consultants and we are proud of what we have done. Yes—there have been little hiccups from time to time, but we are proud of our achievement. My message to all members is that we must ensure that communities unite and take on all the organisations that stand in their way. We must have the courage of our convictions.

17:56

The Minister for Health and Community Care (Malcolm Chisholm): I certainly understand the concerns of the people of Caithness and I was pleased to meet a delegation from Wick when I was in Inverness recently. In reconfiguring and redesigning services, the guiding principle is that there should be the maximum access to local services that is compatible with clinical safety and quality of care. Across Scotland, many services are being moved into local communities from a more central location, as I pointed out at question time. Sometimes, however, change may mean centralising some services where there are good clinical reasons related to safety or service quality.

It would be premature, and procedurally impossible, for me to come to conclusions at this stage on the specific circumstances of Caithness, but I would like to set out some general issues surrounding maternity care and the need for service redesign. The birth rate in Scotland is falling, women are having their first babies at a later age and family size is decreasing. Moreover,

women's lives have changed, with many women working throughout their pregnancies and returning to work relatively quickly. There is therefore more demand for flexible, local antenatal and postnatal care and for less medicalisation of pregnancy and childbirth. That is what the NHS aims to provide.

Some women who have been assessed as high risk, will require specialised care during childbirth. In a country such as Scotland, that cannot be delivered locally in every area, and women may have to travel for delivery or for some specialised aspects of their antenatal care. However, most of a pregnant woman's care can be delivered in her local community, regardless of where she will actually deliver.

In 2002, I set up the expert group on acute maternity services. Membership consisted of people from a wide range of professional backgrounds and geographic interests. The group concluded that the current configuration of acute maternity services needed to change. Women at risk of complications in pregnancy should have consultant-led care, but the falling birth rate means that some maternity units will not care for sufficient numbers of women and babies to ensure safety and quality. Some consultant-led units may therefore close and, where that happens, the group advocates the establishment of midwife-led community maternity units, a large number of which are already operating successfully throughout the United Kingdom.

In those units, the midwife's role will be maximised and midwives will lead the management of pregnancy and childbirth for low-risk women. Overall, our aim is to ensure that services are maintained at the local level rather than lost. That approach is already reflected on the ground—in Orkney and Fort William, for example. The crux of modernising maternity services is to ensure a quality service that is woman centred, provided as locally as possible and provided by the most appropriate professional.

Remote and rural areas present specific challenges for the provision of maternity care. Professor Calder's report spells out the impact on hospital consultants of dealing with only a small number of pregnancies each year. That affects the quality and safety of the service as well as the ability to attract and retain consultants. It is difficult for consultants to maintain clinical competence in the absence of regular and appropriate clinical practice.

Rob Gibson began his speech by quoting the first point made in the executive summary of Professor Calder's report. I will repeat it:

"The provision of specialist obstetric care at Caithness General Hospital is unsatisfactory to the extent of being

unsafe in the view of obstetricians currently working in the Highland Region."

I do not think that that can be easily discounted. As politicians, we have to listen to the views of clinicians. There may be a range of ways of addressing the problem, but we cannot simply dismiss it out of hand.

Carolyn Leckie: I fully agree with the minister that the concerns of clinicians should be taken into account. Does he agree with me that the concerns of the people on the ground, the midwives who are dealing with most of the deliveries, need equally to be taken into account, but that those concerns are not fully addressed in the Calder report?

Malcolm Chisholm: I absolutely agree with that—when I use the word "clinicians", I mean doctors, nurses, midwives and other health professionals. As we know, there are a range of views among midwives. As Carolyn Leckie knows, the Royal College of Midwives is very positive and supportive about the development of midwife-led units, but I accept the fact that Carolyn has concerns about that, which reflect the view of some midwives. I reiterate, however, that a large number of midwives are very positive about midwife-led units. A large number of those units are operating successfully throughout the United Kingdom.

The various challenges to existing services need to be met with innovative ways of working to support pregnant women before, during and after childbirth. Innovative solutions to local problems might require professionals to develop a different range of skills. They certainly require professionals to involve the community in devising different arrangements and patterns of provision. Moreover, as Professor Calder points out on page 19 of his report, there is a possibility of consultants working across sites, as Maureen Macmillan and others have highlighted. That is something that NHS Highland should certainly explore, although I agree with Eleanor Scott that Rob Gibson's specific suggestion in that regard is naive.

Mr McNeil: Can the minister give some positive examples of where the new consultant contract will make a difference so as to ensure the flexibility that will be necessary to give the people we represent accessible services?

Malcolm Chisholm: The job planning for that is being undertaken now. Those issues should certainly be addressed in the context of the consultant contract, which is a great lever for service redesign. Part of service redesign involves the possibility of working across sites. At question time today, I mentioned my visit to Stracathro on Friday. I was enormously impressed by the number of clinicians from Ninewells who are prepared to go and work at Stracathro on the

basis of doing elective sessions there. That is a model that should certainly be pursued. As I was saying before that intervention, it is something that NHS Highland should explore. Clearly, there are difficulties. Under the current arrangements, consultants cannot be compelled to work across sites. Indeed, if they could be, who knows whether they would want to stay in post? While recognising the difficulties, I think that such options should certainly be explored.

The other dimension that is mentioned in Professor Calder's report is the suggestion that "pluripotential practitioners" should be developed. I do not know whether members are familiar with that phrase. Perhaps Jamie Stone's "multiskilling" of staff is a more straightforward way of putting it. That has already been taken on board. The remote and rural areas resource initiative has a joint project with the north of Scotland regional planning group to identify potential models of maternity care in rural and remote settings, and that involves multiskilling.

Rob Gibson: Will the minister give way?

Malcolm Chisholm: How am I doing for time, Presiding Officer?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am quite relaxed if you want to take a couple more minutes.

Rob Gibson: Professor Calder's report discusses considerable investment in transport, accommodation and the way in which consultants will work. The minister has not mentioned anything about the Government's ability to back that up. On a number of occasions, he has mentioned that NHS Highland has to make up its mind about those things. Does the minister not agree that the problem is a bigger one than NHS Highland can solve on its own?

Malcolm Chisholm: Absolutely, which is why the matter is first on my agenda. There are many dimensions to it. In particular, we had a debate about the work force, and I noted what Rob Gibson said about consultants. The consultant work force is in fact growing more strongly than before. Indeed, there have also been 1,000 extra junior doctors over the past three years. However, there have been particular difficulties and challenges because of having to deal with the working time directive in that connection.

More broadly, we have done the work through EGAMS, there is a national framework for maternity services and we are doing general work on providing a framework for the reconfiguration and redesign of services. There is a balance between national decision making and local decision making, and I do not think that members would want me to sit in St Andrew's House and decree the shape of maternity services throughout Scotland.

Mr Stone: On the notion of balances, the good professor has clearly weighed up what he sees as the clinical risks in terms of what services are provided. What is the minister's assessment or evaluation of the risk that is related to the travel factor that could be added if he goes down the midwife route?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I suggest that that should be the last intervention.

Malcolm Chisholm: Jamie Stone makes an important point. There is obviously a balance between safety and quality on the one hand and access on the other. Notwithstanding the general comments that I made about midwife-led units, about which I am very positive, we all recognise that the distances that are involved are greater than in most other situations. That is an important material factor, but I do not think that Jamie Stone would expect me to give an instant risk assessment of it. However, it is obviously a crucial issue and it will be looked at by NHS Highland.

I have further general points to make, but I suspect that I ran out of time a long time ago, so I will just mention them in summary. I mentioned work that is being done with the north of Scotland regional planning group. I note that the regional dimension is important; as colleagues will have heard me say, we have provided £150,000 for three regional maternity services co-ordinators—that is just part of the regional dimension.

I want to mention the recent establishment of the national maternity services work force planning group and the establishment of the Scottish maternity development unit. The work force group will oversee the development of a strategic approach to integrated work force planning and service development for maternity services. It will consider a wide range of issues, including the specific needs of rural communities and tools such as birthrate plus—I know that Carolyn Leckie is keen on that, and indeed so am I. There will be a response from the Executive on the work load report on nursing and midwifery soon. The development unit will provide low-cost, multidisciplinary training in key areas of maternity service provision.

In conclusion, I emphasise that the key criteria for reviewing maternity services have always been clinical safety and the quality of patient care. In the Highlands, distance and reliability of transport links overlay those considerations, as I acknowledged to Jamie Stone. I am confident that NHS Highland will thoroughly explore these difficult and complex issues with maximum public involvement—indeed, it will be required to do so. If proposals for change come forward, I will certainly scrutinise them with great care before coming to a final view.

Meeting closed at 18:08.

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