

# **MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT**

Thursday 17 November 2005

Session 2

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# Scottish Parliament

Thursday 17 November 2005

[THE DEPUTY PRESIDING OFFICER *opened the meeting at 09:15*]

## Dentistry

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman):** Good morning. The first item of business today is a debate on motion S2M-3584, in the name of Lewis Macdonald, on dentistry. I invite members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons.

09:15

**The Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care (Lewis Macdonald):** Today's debate and announcement are about delivering good news to national health service dentists and patients. We will provide dentists who are committed to treating all categories of patients on the NHS with the rewards and incentives that they deserve.

**Alasdair Morgan (South of Scotland) (SNP):** Will the minister give way?

**Lewis Macdonald:** That is a very early intervention from Mr Morgan, but of course I will give way.

**Alasdair Morgan:** Does the good news to patients include a guarantee of a timescale in which they will be able to register with an NHS dentist?

**Lewis Macdonald:** If Mr Morgan will be patient, he will hear what the good news includes.

The good news is intended to encourage dentists to stick with or, indeed, to come back to the NHS and thereby to enable patients to access NHS dentistry where they want it.

In March this year we published our three-year action plan for improving oral health and modernising NHS dental services. We have committed a record amount of new and additional funding to support delivery of the action plan.

**Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP):** Further to the point that Mr Morgan raised in his earlier intervention, the crisis of access to NHS dentists in many communities is happening now. In many communities, particularly in the rural areas that I represent and including the town of Alyth, there are no longer any NHS dentists, which means that people have to travel formidable distances for treatment. What will be done now to address the fact that people are losing access to essential NHS dentistry services?

**Lewis Macdonald:** My answer to Mr Swinney is the same as my answer to Mr Morgan: if he will have patience, he will hear what we are going to do now.

The additional funding amounts to an extra £45 million in this financial year, rising to £100 million next year and £150 million in 2007-08. Cumulatively, that is additional investment of £295 million in oral health and dental services. Of that total, £237 million will go towards supporting primary care dental services—in other words, to the high street dentist.

I will outline today how we intend to invest the additional money that we are committed to spending in the current financial year.

**Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** I congratulate the minister on the substantial amount of money that is being invested in dentistry. How many dentists will it bring back into the NHS?

**Lewis Macdonald:** There have been three interventions so far in which members have asked me to pre-announce my announcement. My answer to Mary Scanlon is that if she listens to what I say about what we are investing, she may make her own judgment about how successful it will be in providing an incentive to dentists to return to the NHS.

We will spend £4 million this year and £29 million will be provided over the four year action-plan period to support improvements to oral health. In particular, we wish to build on the most recent figures for children's oral health. The national dental inspection programme confirms the best-ever oral health among five-year-olds and shows that the measures that we are taking now are already having a positive effect. However, there is more to do.

**Tricia Marwick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP):** Will the minister give way?

**Lewis Macdonald:** I must make some progress, but I will give way later if members' questions have not been answered.

Two consultants in dental public health are working with NHS boards to develop our agenda. We are actively recruiting staff, including oral health promoters and dental health support workers.

Most NHS boards are already well on their way to meeting the nursery school tooth-brushing target, with in excess of 70,000 children brushing daily. Several boards have started to extend the programme into primary schools that have the highest need. We have two programmes in place—one in the west of Scotland and one in the east—to improve oral health among young children and to target those who have the worst

dental health by offering additional preventive care by dentists and dental care professionals. In addition, we are providing £29 million over the action-plan period—£4 million of it this year—to support improvements to education and training in the dental workforce. A number of measures are already in place to achieve that end.

The dental schools will achieve an output of 135 dental graduates from next year and will exceed that target by 2008, with a potential 180 graduates by 2010.

**Alex Fergusson (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con):** How can we take any comfort from that figure when research shows that only 3 per cent of those dental students intend to work in the NHS?

**Lewis Macdonald:** I will answer that directly. To support the expansion, we are funding additional senior staff linked to the outreach programme for each dental school. A new bursary scheme is currently being finalised; it will be tied to a commitment from students to work in the NHS for five years after their graduation and it will be offered from next year.

We are also expanding existing training in order to deliver more than 200 new dental nurses in 2006-07 and 250 in 2007-08. We are now producing the first ever dental therapists trained in Scotland. Courses are already in place in Glasgow and a new one started this month in Edinburgh. We will match the increased output from the dental schools with vocational training places for all dental care professionals. A number of additional measures are currently being developed; for example, the clinical effectiveness programme that is based in Dundee.

**Richard Lochhead (North East Scotland) (SNP):** Has the minister made any progress towards reaching a decision about whether Scotland requires a third dental school to replace the one that was closed by the Tories some time ago?

**Lewis Macdonald:** I accept the member's point. We have made a commitment to consult by 2007 on the need for a third dental school.

I will move on from education to primary care dental services, which is the nub of many of the questions that have been asked this morning. This year, we will provide £37 million in new and additional funding to support primary care dental services. We are well on course to exceed the commitment that we made some months ago to double the general dental practice allowance this year. Last year, that funding amounted to £4 million and since publication of the action plan, we have made two quarterly payments totalling over £5 million through the allowance, which supports dentists' practice costs. We have also increased

the remote areas allowance to £9,000 a year and are extending it to more practices.

We have already made available in this financial year £5 million to assist with practice improvements. Half of that money is targeted at meeting decontamination requirements. Central purchasing contracts have been arranged for dentists through Scottish healthcare supplies and we are currently finalising contracts for clinical waste disposal.

Critical and central to all those measures is our ensuring that the significant additional funding for primary care dental services goes to dentists who remain loyal to the NHS or to those who choose to return to the NHS in response to the incentives that we provide.

I will share some comments that relate to discussions with the British Dental Association Scotland, which is the nub of Shona Robison's amendment. I assure members that officials have been in regular contact with the BDA and the profession more widely since and before publication of the action plan. I met Robert Donald, chairman of the Scottish dental practice committee—which is the negotiating committee of the BDA—and his officials at the beginning of October. I made it clear to Robert Donald, as I make clear again today, that the additional money that we are providing beyond the increase in the general dental practice allowance is intended to encourage dentists to stick with the NHS. Our position—that we require a commitment from dentists to treat all categories of patients in order to access the extra funding—is non-negotiable. I have made that position clear, both publicly and in meetings with dentists, since then. It is important to be clear about those discussions with the BDA.

Clearly, we want the BDA to support our proposals enthusiastically; after all, it represents half the profession in Scotland. It is a significant player and we want it to be on board. However, as the BDA has been unable to agree to the principle of NHS commitment, it has been necessary for me and my team to move ahead and to define the commitment in more detail.

Yesterday, I made our position clear publicly—for the benefit of MSPs and our constituents who are finding it difficult to access services—and directly to the BDA. I will reiterate what I said yesterday to ensure that everyone is clear about it. The test of NHS commitment is that a practice needs to treat 500 NHS patients and 100 fee-paying adults per dentist, and its gross NHS earnings must be at least £50,000. Practices need to maintain or increase their registration profile to continue to qualify for the additional allowances.

**Richard Lochhead:** We all accept the need for more incentives to attract dentists back into the

NHS. However, the minister will appreciate that in many parts of Scotland there are no NHS dentists. If the package that he has announced does not succeed in attracting more dentists back into the NHS, what is his plan B?

**Lewis Macdonald:** I will give members the details of the package, because doing so might provide an answer to the question that several members have asked about whether we will succeed in getting more dentists back into the NHS.

We have signalled to dentists our intention to introduce reimbursement of the current market rental of dentistry premises to NHS-committed dentists. Valuations are under way, and in the December payment schedules we will make an interim payment of £4 million towards those valuations and that reimbursement. Final payments will be backdated to April 2005. Moreover, to reward dentists who are committed to NHS dentistry, we will again double the general dental practice allowance to 12 per cent of gross NHS earnings. That represents a further investment of £7 million in NHS-committed practices.

Since I took up this ministerial post and assumed responsibility for dentistry, I have sought to engage with dentists throughout Scotland and their representatives. Although there has been disagreement in some areas, we have reached clear agreement on others. For example, many dentists are concerned about the costs of decontamination, which must be met. Although we have already made £2.5 million available this year to address those costs, we realise that some items in the dentistry statement of remuneration are particularly affected by the need for decontamination. As a result, I announce a further increase in the item of service fees, mainly for root-canal treatment, which will provide more than £1 million to support delivery of those critical services.

I also announce a range of increases of up to 70 per cent in the continuing care and capitation allowances, which will provide an additional £10 million in a full year to support registration of adults and children in the NHS. Moreover—this is not relevant to this financial year—we will introduce from next April an allowance of £9,000 per dentist to dentists who serve disadvantaged urban areas to match our existing commitment to practitioners in remote and rural areas.

**Mr Swinney:** Will the minister give way?

**Mr Jim Wallace (Orkney) (LD):** Will the minister give way?

**Lewis Macdonald:** Given the time, I really must make progress.

The current NHS system already provides additional financial support for treating children who have learning disabilities. By doubling the continuing care payment—which will mean an extra £2.8 million a year—we will extend that provision to adults in recognition of the additional time that is required to treat such patients. Furthermore, from early next year, as part of our drive towards prevention, we will spend £2.8 million a year to make fissure sealants available to all children who have permanent molar teeth.

We are making those significant investments in order that we reflect the value that we place on NHS-committed dentists and the services that they provide. My vision for the future, which is shared by other Executive ministers, is of an NHS dentistry service that is delivered, in the main, by motivated and well-rewarded general dental practitioners. I realise that there is a place for a salaried service and we have invested significant funds in that. However, I acknowledge the point that has been made by many people to whom I have spoken that the future delivery of effective NHS dentistry depends on high street dentists' continuing commitment, and on attracting back dentists who have chosen to reduce their NHS commitment.

I believe that that combination of measures and the requirement for commitment to the NHS to access this significant additional funding will persuade many dentists that they will be better off either sustaining their commitment to the NHS or coming back into the service if they have chosen to go elsewhere. The record funding package and the measures that I have outlined today demonstrate our continuing support for NHS dentistry to the benefit of patients and practitioners.

I move,

That the Parliament notes the widespread concern about loss of access to NHS dentists; endorses the view that public resources should be focussed on the provision of NHS dentistry available to all and measures proven to improve oral health; welcomes the progress that has been made to date in implementing *Improving Oral Health and Modernising NHS Dental Services in Scotland*; recognises the positive developments in improving oral health, supporting dental education and training, increasing the workforce and supporting primary care dental services, and acknowledges the vital contribution which NHS dental services make to health improvement and patient care.

09:30

**Shona Robison (Dundee East) (SNP):** We must end the foghorn diplomacy that we have seen of late. It is unhelpful and, indeed, is in danger of alienating ordinary dentists, the vast majority of whom want to do the best for their patients. We accept that a small number of dentists have not put their patients' interests first;

however, that is not true of the majority of dentists, who are a bit fed up with being portrayed as greedy and insensitive to their patients' needs.

**Lewis Macdonald:** I agree completely—it would be entirely inappropriate to portray the vast majority of dentists in that way.

What is the Scottish National Party's view of the difference in principle between the BDA's approach and that of the Executive? We believe that additional funding should be given to dentists who are committed NHS dentistry, but the BDA does not.

**Shona Robison:** I will address that question in a moment.

The tone and atmosphere of discussions are sometimes almost as important as the issues that are being discussed, and I am very concerned about the tone and atmosphere of the current discussions—indeed, about the lack of such discussions. It is hard to see how, in such an atmosphere, the dentistry profession will be encouraged to agree to the proposed deal. Of course, it must agree: what will happen to the Executive's plans if many dentists simply walk away? We must remember that, in the research that the Health Committee commissioned in February, only 3.5 per cent of primary care dentists stated that they intend to increase over the next two years the time that they spend treating NHS patients.

Without the co-operation of general dental practitioners, the Executive's plans cannot and will not be delivered and the crisis in NHS dentistry will worsen. Access problems cannot be resolved simply by increasing NHS-salaried dentists, which—although we welcome the move—will bring only a relatively small number of dentists into the system. They cannot be resolved by making a few deals with companies such as Integrated Dental Holdings Ltd or, indeed, by welcoming into Scotland a small number of dentists from Poland and elsewhere. Even with the most optimistic forecasts, such measures will not be enough to fill the gap. We need GPs to stay with the NHS or, if they have left it, to rejoin, but I am afraid that such an aim will not be achieved in an atmosphere of hostility and bad faith.

**Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab):** On the tone of the negotiations, does Shona Robison share my concern that Robert Donald, who is negotiating with the Executive on behalf of the BDA, is also the chairman of a company called Independent Care Plans UK Ltd and actively promotes private plans around Scotland?

**Shona Robison:** That is an example of the problem that I have been highlighting. There is fault on both sides in the negotiations and, for the record, I agree with the Executive that adults

should be included in the definition of NHS commitment. However, if we are to have the best chance of success, the onus is on the Executive to create the right atmosphere.

I have to say that I have been very concerned about the Executive's approach. For example, it ran to the press just as yesterday's talks were about to start. Does that help in reaching a successful outcome? I suggest that it does not. Moreover, on the attempts to sideline BDA Scotland, it is neither here nor there whether the Executive likes the organisation. The BDA is the professional association and trade union for dentists in the UK and, like it or not, the Executive will have to agree the deal with it.

The Executive's release of the answer to Stewart Stevenson's parliamentary question on dental salaries is another example of an attempt to brief the press to make dentists look greedy, without mentioning that the gross figures that were referred to are required to pay for staff costs and premises, too. That was disingenuous to say the least, and was seen by ordinary dentists as an attack on them.

**Lewis Macdonald:** It is important to clarify for the record that the parliamentary answer that was given to Stewart Stevenson stated specifically that it referred to dentists' gross earnings from NHS work.

**Shona Robison:** The Executive's spin doctors put the spin that I described on the story when they were speaking to the press. A bit of honesty in the debate would not go amiss.

My concern is about what it all means to the patient. There are patients who cannot get access to a dentist or who are in danger of losing the dentists whom they have at the moment. A huge gamble is being taken that dentists will sign up to the deal, despite failure to agree its terms with their representatives. I would like to know what evidence the Executive has that its strategy will work. Can the minister guarantee that progressing the proposals without the agreement of the BDA will not lead to acceleration of deregistrations? I also want the minister to answer in summing up the question that my colleague, Richard Lochhead, asked: what is plan B?

On the detail of the plan and the definition of NHS commitment—bearing in mind that we saw the plan only yesterday and that the dental profession has not yet responded to it—we support the broad principle that a practice must provide general dental services to all categories of patients in order to secure the new allowances. We also agree that the required number of registered NHS patients appears to be reasonable and is not a particularly high threshold. We have some concerns, particularly about measuring NHS



commitment on the basis of gross NHS earnings, which must be £50,000 or above per dentist if they are to receive 100 per cent of the new allowances. One of our concerns is about the position of part-time dentists, many of whom are women, who might be disadvantaged by the criteria. I ask the minister to respond to that concern in his summing up.

As I said, what is on the table is broadly acceptable to us, but it is the way in which the plan has come about that concerns us most, and we believe that that puts at risk the chances of its being successfully implemented. If the dental profession itself does not sign up to the plan, it will not be good for patients. The Executive's target is that an additional 400,000 patients be registered with an NHS dentist by March 2008, but only last year nearly 58,000 patients were deregistered as more dentists left the NHS. Access to dentists in many parts of Scotland remains as difficult as ever, and that is before we even discuss delivery of the free dental checks which, if access is not improved, will be a theoretical rather than a real entitlement, which will lead to further public dissatisfaction.

There is not a problem only in primary care: secondary care dental services are also a real cause for concern, with a rise in overall waiting times for all specialties since 2004. In Glasgow, patients have to wait 15 months for specialist orthodontic work, compared with 30 weeks in 2004. We must get that part of the system right, as well.

In frustration, the people who can afford to are turning to the private sector. There has been a huge increase in the number of people taking out private dental plans. However, not everyone can afford to do that, and those who can afford to should not have to. Given that they pay their taxes, people should be entitled to treatment through the NHS. The Executive will be judged on whether everyone who wants access to an NHS dentist will get access to an NHS dentist within a reasonable timeframe. It is unfortunate that the minister could not provide my colleague, Alasdair Morgan, with a timeframe for that.

Those are some of the challenges that we face. There are other challenges to do with training of dentists; our support for a third dental school is on record. We are a bit fed up of hearing about endless consultations on that and we want to see some progress.

The proposals that the Executive has made will not turn the situation around, but the plan could be a step in the right direction if, and only if, the Executive can take the dental profession with it. That can be achieved only through constructive dialogue between the Executive and the British Dental Association, so we look forward to a bit more of that.

I move amendment S2M-3584.2, to leave out from "welcomes" to end and insert:

"acknowledges the vital contribution which NHS dental services make to health improvement and patient care; believes that to progress implementing *Improving Oral Health and Modernising NHS Dental Services in Scotland* requires the co-operation of the dental profession, and therefore urges the Scottish Executive and the British Dental Association urgently to reach agreement on the definition of 'NHS commitment' in order to secure the future of NHS dentistry in Scotland."

09:40

**Mrs Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con):** NHS dentistry has all but disappeared from parts of Scotland, as more and more dentists become disillusioned by the pressures of bureaucracy and low fees, which have put them on the often-cited treadmill of drilling and filling. They have been in the situation of seeing patient after patient without having the time to deal properly with them or to look at their overall dental welfare.

If dentists pick them up, today's announcements should help to allay some of the concerns that have resulted in dentists leaving the NHS. However, I know from my dealings with them that dentists who have left the NHS have absolutely no intention of returning to it, whatever is on offer. Given the current general anger and distrust in the profession, I have no confidence that the measures will result in the commitment that the minister requires from dentists if they are to access the funding that is on offer.

**Lewis Macdonald:** What would Nanette Milne do to encourage dentists who will not return "whatever is on offer", to use her words?

**Mrs Milne:** We can more or less forget about the dentists who have left the service. We are considering those who have not yet left. I have to say that I agree with the BDA, which is looking for a sliding scale of commitment. The minister is saying that there will be an absolute cut-off point before any funding can be accessed, but the sliding scale is a much more interesting proposition, so I am upset that he is not negotiating that with the BDA. There is great distrust, and I really do not think that dentists will come back. They are continuing to deregister patients from the NHS, and dentists to whom I have spoken are basically angry.

The situation does not augur well for the implementation of free dental checks for all in 2007, but that is probably just as well, because it is wasteful to extend free checks to people who can perfectly well afford to pay for them, especially when there are not enough NHS dentists to carry out the treatments that may be identified after check-ups.

As most dentists are independently contracted to the NHS, they are perfectly within their rights to opt out of the service. Their being lambasted by successive ministers as being greedy and disloyal to their patients—we have heard that in this chamber—does nothing to improve the situation and it will certainly not help to keep disillusioned dentists in the NHS or to entice back those who have left. The profession is extremely angry, and the attitude of ministers has infuriated dentists.

**Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD):** Will Nanette Milne give way?

**Mrs Milne:** No. I need all my time.

The action plan that was put on the table several months ago left dentists wholly unimpressed, and they have continued to leave the service in significant numbers. The aims of the plan were seen by the professionals as being laudable, but they do not really think that the increase in committed dentists can be achieved. In the eight months since the plan was announced, there have been on-going negotiations between the Executive and the British Dental Association, as the minister has said, but there has been a failure to agree the terms of the financial package and dentists continue to leave the NHS. The negotiations were certainly not helped by yesterday's announcement of the commitment that the Executive expects. I was listening to Andrew Lamb on the radio this morning, immediately ahead of a meeting that he had been expecting to have yesterday afternoon, and he was clearly incensed.

The stopgap measure of recruiting overseas graduates as salaried dentists in the NHS will, although it is welcome, have little impact on the worst-affected areas of Scotland and will not provide a long-term solution to the problems of NHS dentistry. The plans for the dental outreach facility in Aberdeen to bring senior dental students into the north-east and the funding for the extra 20 students who started training in Dundee are welcome too, but will there be enough teaching staff to train them? I am told that there may be some difficulty in recruiting staff from Dundee to Aberdeen.

**Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD):** Will Nanette Milne give way?

**Mrs Milne:** I will not give way. I am short of time.

There is difficulty in getting staff who are willing to come to Aberdeen. I am told that lecturers from fairly far north may be asked to come out of retirement to provide that service in Aberdeen. I have to say that that is anecdotal evidence, but there is concern that it might be the case.

There is no apparent shortage of young people who are willing to train in dentistry, but there is real difficulty in retaining them in the NHS workforce.

As in other professions, there is a high proportion of female graduates, most of whom will want time out to raise a family. Many male graduates, too, are taking time off work to pursue other interests—often not in dentistry. A University of Dundee study said that most students want to work in mixed private and public practices.

**Mike Rumbles:** Considering that many of the problems in dentistry stem from the closure by the last Conservative Government of the third dental school in Scotland, does the member now acknowledge that that closure was a mistake, and would she support the Liberal Democrats and the Executive in moving towards a third dental school for Scotland in Aberdeen?

**Mrs Milne:** That dental school was closed a long time ago, and it was closed on sound advice at the time. The information that I am getting from dentists is that there are enough students; the problem is that they are not staying in the service. Only a very small proportion have said that they will commit themselves to NHS dentistry. The possibility of companies such as IDH putting NHS dentistry services in place might help. However, its staff turnover is high, and patients will not get continuity of care from it.

The present situation is unacceptable, with the NHS failing to recruit young dentists or to retain those who have been contracted to it. Most dentistry is delivered in high street general dental practices. Overheads are high, so the offer of help with some of those overheads is welcome, but even with that help, the financial rewards for dentists are not huge. Silly figures have been bandied about in the press, although I accept that the minister has said that they are gross figures. The public, however, does not see that they are gross figures. That puts dentists into bad repute, because people think that they are earning huge salaries. In fact, their take-home money is relatively small, when one looks at the training that goes into their expertise. The minister is promising a great deal of money, but it still falls short of what the BDA says is required. Dentists have been unimpressed by the offer.

My party feels that we have to examine how oral healthcare is delivered in other countries and to learn from their experiences. We would like to see NHS dental services available for everyone, but we may have to look outside the NHS. That is recommended even by some dentists in the health service.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You must finish now.

**Mrs Milne:** I was going to speak a bit more about my policies, but the minister would not pay much attention to them anyway. Instead, I

encourage him to look carefully at my amendment and to support it.

I move amendment S2M-3584.1, to leave out from “endorses” to end and insert:

“is further concerned that the Scottish Executive’s initiatives will not entice dentists back to the NHS; recognises the increased support in dental education, employment of overseas dentists and financial packages enacted by the Executive but sees this as a stopgap solution which will do nothing to stem the tide of dentists leaving the NHS in the future; calls for more initiatives for dentists to undertake preventative work, a reduction in bureaucracy and for the Executive to create a more genuine and innovative debate on the future of dentistry, and further calls on the Executive to engage positively with the wider profession to ensure that reforms and initiatives enable every patient to have access to a dentist.”

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I remind members that if they speak over their time—Mrs Milne was 40 seconds over hers—that will cut out members on the back benches.

09:48

**Carolyn Leckie (Central Scotland) (SSP):** I start by apologising to the chamber for being late. I did not avail myself of the irresponsible drinks promotions in the foyer last night and went home, then suffered from the traffic this morning.

I appreciate being able to make this speech. I start by saying that it is quite amusing and heart-warming to hear the Tories sticking up for low-paid workers. It will be interesting to see whether they stick up for local authority workers, such as the women who are currently being bullied into accepting unacceptable compensation for equal pay. I hope that the Tories will sign my motion on that.

**Alex Fergusson:** Is it in order, Presiding Officer, to point out that this is a debate on dentistry?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I am giving Ms Leckie another second to get into the debate.

**Carolyn Leckie:** It was irony. My amendment refers to the inequalities that undoubtedly exist in dental health status. Although areas such as Lanarkshire definitely benefit from community dentistry, which has been a success of health policy over the years, the inequalities in dental health persist. There is inequality even in the free distribution of toothbrushes and toothpaste: the more affluent areas of Lanarkshire get more toothbrushes and toothpaste per head of population than the more deprived areas do. Those figures come from a recent Lanarkshire Health Board publication.

The Executive, dentists and health boards have a long way to go to address the inequalities in dental health and to allow people greater access

to a dentist. It is true that rural areas suffer most from a lack of access to dentists.

We must tackle head on the fact that dentists are, in effect, rewarded for repair work; they are rewarded not for preventing ill health or for preventing decay but for the number of fillings and procedures that they carry out. The poor dental health of the children of Lanarkshire is a cash cow for dentists. That is completely unacceptable.

I do not subscribe to the notion that dentists are low paid. I understand that payments to most dentists are not as high as has been portrayed in the media, but compared with the Scottish population, they are very well paid: 75 per cent of Scots earn less than £25,000 a year.

We have created a rare elite in dentistry, and that is the focus of my amendment. We need radical action to face it down. We must widen access to education for dentistry and we must ensure that, in future, dentists are not a rare, privileged elite, but a common profession that is rewarded fairly and appropriately. It should not be an exclusive profession that can hold patients to ransom.

It is apparent that when it comes to big business, private health providers or elites in society, the Executive—encouraged by the SNP—takes an approach of all carrot and almost no stick, although I appreciate that it is perhaps applying just a wee twig to the BDA at present.

I find it shocking that the SNP’s only answer to the problems of dental provision is more carrot. It wants to stuff dentists’ mouths full of gold. The SNP wants to keep rewarding dentists with more when they ask for it—unlike *Oliver Twist*. Dentists, along with consultants in the health service, have had more carrots stuffed down their mouths than Bugs Bunny.

**Stewart Stevenson (Banff and Buchan) (SNP):** I am grateful to the member for allowing me to intervene. I ask her: what would she do?

**Carolyn Leckie:** I do not think that the member has read my amendment. What I would do is quite simple in the short term: as the amendment says, I would get a commitment from people who are trained by the state to continue to work solely for the NHS for at least five years, under a salaried scheme. I thought that the SNP supported that. I have an amendment that Shona Robison lodged a wee while ago that refers to having more NHS-salaried dentists. I wonder whether that is still the SNP’s position.

**Shona Robison:** It is.

**Carolyn Leckie:** Well, in that case, I hope that the SNP will support my amendment. It is time to face dentists down; it is time to demand a commitment; and it is time to run NHS dentistry to

meet the needs of patients, not of dentists. That is where the negotiations should be focusing. If the BDA is a trade union, it will be happy to participate in collective negotiations on a salary scale.

The amendment does not refer to current dentists—I do not claim that it is a panacea. However, it does attempt to tackle the problem head on. It would open up access to training and would get from the dentists we train an NHS commitment for at least five years. That is a policy to which the Executive aspires and which its consultation found a majority of correspondents to be in favour of. I am encouraging the Executive to grasp the nettle on those two points.

When surveyed, the vast majority of NHS patients in Scotland say that they want NHS dentistry. In rural areas, they are taken hostage and are blackmailed into going private. In effect, NHS dentists have been blackmailing low-paid workers with exorbitant fines that chase them off the NHS register and then have been holding them to ransom to bring them back to their surgeries as private patients. That is completely and utterly unacceptable. We must take radical action. It is time to face them down, not roll over.

The situation is completely unacceptable. If this Parliament, with its devolved powers, is not able to tackle the elites of our society and apply the same sticks to them as it does to teenagers, asylum seekers and pensioners—people in the most vulnerable sections of society—it is not worth the money that we paid for it.

I move amendment S2M-3584.3, to leave out from “welcomes” to end and insert:

“regrets that inequalities in dental health status and access to dental services persist; believes that NHS dental provision is under serious threat; further believes that radical action in recruitment and widening of access to dentistry training is urgently required, and believes that the dentists whom the state educates and trains should be required to give a minimum commitment to NHS service of five years, within an agreed NHS salaried career structure.”

09:55

**Euan Robson (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD):** The short time that is available to us this morning is hardly enough to deal with what is probably one of our most intractable problems. It is certainly among the most difficult that I have come across during my time in public life. The seeds of the current problems in dentistry were without question sown in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The failure of the Government at that time to modernise the terms and conditions under which dental practitioners were paid for NHS work, coupled with the closure of the Edinburgh dental school, led, in part, to the problems that we face today. When the closure of the dental school was proposed, the British Dental Association said that

there was a real risk of an oversupply of trained dentists. That turned out to be a terrible irony.

I commend the Executive for creating the opportunity for up to 15 extra dental students to graduate each year, for its action on the outreach centre in Aberdeen and for the forthcoming consultation on a new dental school in Aberdeen. I also welcome the important package that the Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care announced this morning, which covers workforce, education and training aspects and deals with oral health and general dental services.

There is no doubt that health boards have taken considerable strides in recruiting NHS salaried dentists, who are being deployed around the country. Borders NHS Board has made use of some of the available funds, and I am pleased to see new dentists and staff in Hawick and Kelso, in my constituency. There has been investment in new surgeries and facilities. My understanding is that further recruits are to be sought—despite local Tory critics’ pronouncements—among the next wave of Polish dentists. Therefore, some Polish dentists will join the Polish community that already exists in the Borders.

The new investment will help to deal with pain relief and urgent dental work for individuals who are not registered with a practice, as well as with the traditional forms of community dental work for children and the elderly. However, we should be clear that, although the investment in NHS salaried dentists is welcome, it cannot possibly fill the gaps that have recently been created. In other words, the welcome investment is necessary, but it does not represent all the solution; rather, it forms part of the solution in certain areas.

I will address briefly one of the points that Carolyn Leckie made. It is absolutely essential that we promote better dental health. By investing in dentistry, we are dealing with the problems caused by a failure to invest in health promotion. We still need to do more in schools and in the community to invest in dental health promotion. That is something on which Liberal Democrats are very clear.

On the Executive’s proposals to enhance general practice, the investment of £295 million is clearly significant and is more, I think, than the Opposition demanded. The question is how that sum will be divided. Around £60 million will go on workforce education and training and on oral health and general dental services over three years, which will leave around £237 million for the NHS salaried sector and general dental practitioners. I am sometimes asked how much money will go to general dental practitioners. My view is that it will be the great balance of that £237 million, for the simple reason that general dental

practitioners represent the most important component in delivering dental services.

We know from the figures that came out in response to a question from Stewart Stevenson what dentists generally earn. However, it is important to stress that we have been discussing gross earnings. That is why the package is directed at cutting some of the costs of general dental practice. I think that dentists should continue to earn significant sums from the NHS, because the work that they do is immensely valuable. It is critical. Dentists work very hard in a difficult profession—one in which I would not want to engage. The prospect of peering into other people's mouths is not something that appeals to me or to many other people. It is a very difficult job.

The Executive's package is a huge investment, and I sincerely hope that the sceptics in the dental profession will recognise it as such. The minister has confirmed that the statement of dental remuneration will commence in April 2006. That will usher in a huge simplification of the charging scale, with the number of variables going from about 400 to about 40. Surely that will address the bureaucracy that dentists have raised as an issue in the past.

The minister has set the access threshold for new money at a sensible level. A dentist with 500 or more patients need take only 100 NHS fee-paying adults to access the package. It is hard to envisage why any dentist could not reach that threshold and thereby qualify. I take the point that has been made about part-time dentists, and I hope that the minister will address that issue in due course.

I record my party's welcome for the allocations that have been announced today, for the general dental practice allowance, for the rent rebate scheme, for practice improvements, including decontamination, and for capitation and continuing care. The package should encourage dentists to continue to take NHS fee-paying patients and I hope that it will draw dentists back into taking such patients. Indeed, we all have a duty to help to persuade dentists to take NHS fee-paying patients, because there is nowhere else to go.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We now come to the open debate. We are three minutes behind, so I will be tight on members' six minutes.

10:02

**Dr Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab):** I note what you say, Presiding Officer.

Of all the issues that constituents have presented to me over the years, the lack of access to dental services, NHS or private, is among the

most common. It is also one of the most frustrating. Over the past few years, the situation in Dumfries and Galloway has worsened, despite the efforts of the Scottish Executive and Dumfries and Galloway NHS Board. A steady stream of dentists who worked under contract to the NHS have decided to terminate their contracts, abandoning thousands of loyal patients as they shorten their lists. We have then seen the unedifying spectacle of patients, many of them elderly, and adults on low incomes, being forced to queue for hours in the hope of being accepted on to private lists.

**Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** Who is to blame?

**Dr Murray:** The Conservatives—that is who is to blame.

Adults on low incomes, who include pensioners, are each being charged anything from £12 to £18 per month and do not have the option of paying for their treatment as they go or making their own insurance payments. One pensioner couple told me that they were being asked to pay almost £450 for two check-ups a year, with any treatment incurring further costs. Unfortunately, as Richard Baker said, many dental practices are now also requiring patients to pay an additional insurance premium. A practice, which might have 1,200 patients, could be taking in £250,000 before it performs any treatment on patients.

I would not want to be a dentist, and I have much sympathy for dentists, but I want them to come back to the NHS. The people I care about are my constituents who cannot get a dentist and who sometimes cannot get dental treatment even if they are in pain. I stress again: my primary concern is not for the dentists, but for my constituents. Why should somebody who takes in £250,000 before they carry out any treatment get extra money off the NHS because they treat one or two children for free?

We all know the history of the sorry problems, which arose from decisions taken by the Conservative Government. In fact, I will not altogether blame the Conservatives. As it happens, they were supported and advised by the British Dental Association, on the ground that the BDA wished to avoid

"either underemployment or unemployment of dentists".

Heavens above—what a successful trade union! The BDA obviously had considerably more clout with the Government than the National Union of Mineworkers did. Am I being uncharitable in thinking that the BDA helped to engineer the problem to the profit of its members and that the dental schools at University College London and the University of Edinburgh were closed as a consequence? The decision was questioned at the

time and, indeed, opposed by the senate of the University of Edinburgh. We all know what the consequences have been.

I am not saying that we can rewrite that dismal history. The problems that it caused are not easy to solve, not least because it takes seven years to train a dentist. Opposition politicians have talked a lot of nonsense about the Scottish Executive and Dumfries and Galloway NHS Board being complacent or failing to act, which is simply not true. I have been in touch with Executive ministers on the issue regularly over the past few years and I am aware of the many incentives that it has offered, such as golden hellos, additional payments for designated areas and grants to dentists who want to establish new practices, to try to tempt more dentists to join the NHS. Sadly, many of those efforts have been countermanded as yet more contracted dentists opt for the golden road.

**Stewart Stevenson:** How many golden hellos have been paid in Dumfries and Galloway?

**Dr Murray:** I have absolutely no idea, because I have not asked that question.

The minister has addressed the Executive's approach, which I support fully. I will say a bit about what Dumfries and Galloway NHS Board is doing. It has applied for permission to appoint a number of salaried dentist posts—I believe that six have been filled and one is pending. It is also finalising negotiations with Integrated Dental Holdings to provide 10 NHS dentists, who will be located in three fully equipped surgeries. I hope that they will be in place within the next six months. A recruitment drive was held in Scandinavia at the end of last month. I understand from the medical director that the board is now considering how it can translate the interest shown by dentists there into permanent NHS dental posts.

I admit that I was disappointed when I heard that NHS Dumfries and Galloway had not received any of the first 15 Polish dentists. However, again, we find a lot of nonsense being talked by Opposition politicians who say that Dumfries and Galloway was being ignored. It was not; the health board did not ask for the dentists. I wondered why not, but the reason given in a letter from Dr Angus Cameron dated 3 November is that it did not feel able to provide accommodation for any of the first tranche, but it is interested in the second tranche. I say to the minister that Dumfries and Galloway is a seriously affected area, so he should please give favourable consideration to any request from NHS Dumfries and Galloway for the second tranche of Polish dentists.

The board is also in negotiation with the chief dental officer and a recruitment agency in

Czechoslovakia regarding the possible recruitment of dentists from that country. In addition, I understand that the full business case has been drawn up for a dental centre in Dumfries, which, when fully operational, will have 16 dental surgeries.

Another interesting approach is the proposal to develop local training for dental technicians, who would be trained to undertake routine procedures that do not require the expertise of a dental surgeon with seven years' training. We can go down that road. Approaches have been made in general practice to allow other professionals to take on some of the more routine work and to liberate the highly trained dentists for more difficult procedures.

All in all, there are a number of things about which to be optimistic. There have been so many disappointments for people over the years. I appreciate that at the moment people might be taking it on trust that some of the things will work, but I believe that if we work together we can improve this desperate situation. We need to do so, because if we do not, the oral health of people in Dumfries and Galloway, which is already poor, will just deteriorate.

10:08

**Roseanna Cunningham (Perth) (SNP):** There are two sides to this coin: the patients, or those who try and often fail to become patients; and the dentists. We know that Scotland's dental performance is pretty dismal in comparison with that of other countries, notably that of our old friends in Scandinavia and the Netherlands, who somehow manage to turn in a much better dental record than we do. As well as our bad national dental record, which is historical, there are other pressures that have led us to this debate today.

The Health Committee's research from earlier this year, which we debated on 21 April, showed that, in the past two years, just over 10 per cent of dentists in Scotland increased their number of NHS hours, while more than 25 per cent reduced their NHS work. I do not suppose that that comparison has changed markedly since then; although it might have changed for the worse rather than for the better.

In Tayside, which is of particular concern to me, nearly 30 per cent of dentists have cut the number of NHS hours they provide and, more worryingly, 41.5 per cent are either not accepting new children into their practices or are operating a waiting list. In Perth and Kinross, the picture is even worse. I believe that I am right in saying that no dental practice in the area is taking on new NHS patients. I guess that that is common to many other parts of the country. It means that many people are being

forced into the private sector or off the dentist's couch altogether, simply because they cannot afford treatment. Elaine Murray illustrated the point graphically.

Tayside NHS Board, like other health boards, has taken steps to alleviate the situation. Dentists working from the Drumhar medical centre include an additional salaried dentist who was taken on to deal with emergency work only for children and the elderly on the basis of people phoning first thing in the morning for an appointment that day. The centre intends to take on two or three more salaried dentists to add to that provision. However, the restrictions on who can obtain an appointment mean that there is still a huge unmet need in Perthshire.

There are plans to expand the number of salaried dentists. I know that a bid is in for a 24-strong community dental service. I understand that the outcome of that will be known by early December. By way of a little gentle lobbying, I say that I hope that the bid is successful, because it would make a huge difference to the situation in Perthshire.

Many members have similar stories from their areas. In many parts of the country, the ratio of dentists to population reinforces what we know of people's real-life experiences from the cases with which we deal daily in our postbag and in our surgeries. It is getting harder and harder to find an NHS dentist who is willing to do NHS work. Without such dentists, it is difficult to see how improvement plans can be delivered, much less the promised universal oral health assessments.

Earlier this year, I decided to conduct a small, local survey of dentists in my constituency to ascertain their views and concerns. All dentists were sent a questionnaire. We had an excellent response rate, as evidenced by the 25 per cent who returned the questionnaire within a day of receiving it. The speed with which they responded showed their concerns. The single most important reason for their moving out of the NHS was finance, which was followed closely by lack of time.

The flight from the NHS has led to other obvious consequences. There is now a big difference between waiting times for an appointment for NHS patients and those for people who have gone private. I am concerned that the situation that exists in other parts of the health service will be replicated, with private patients being taken quickly and others having to wait quite a long time.

In the survey, dentists were asked what they would do to change things. It was depressing that some of them felt that the situation was irredeemable—a word used directly in the survey. Others simply said that there should be either

more money or more dentists, or a combination of the two. That is not exactly rocket science.

I join other members in saying that taking on the dentists is not a particularly helpful way forward. I will be interested to see whether today's announcement attracts back any of the dentists whom I surveyed. The minister can be sure that I will resurvey them on the basis of the announcement. However, some of the comments that have been made today are highly unlikely to encourage them back. We must take care that we do not end up driving them out instead of attracting them back, as a result of the attitudes that are being expressed.

Jamie Stone mentioned the Polish recruitment.

**Members:** It was Euan Robson.

**Roseanna Cunningham:** I attributed the remark wrongly. Everybody welcomes that recruitment drive. I would like to hear the minister expand on how the Executive intends to roll it out in future, the global numbers and so on. Tayside NHS Board has not asked for any of the dentists; at the moment it does not think that it will have to. However, it is precisely such thinking that is needed to stop the immediate rot.

There are anomalies that must be addressed. I cannot understand why it is possible for dentists to get assistance to start a new practice but not to buy out an existing practice if a dentist is retiring. I wonder whether that anomaly could be considered in the future.

The SNP recognises the mountain that is to be climbed in tackling the problems, including our appalling record and the appalling state of our system of dental care. There are ways of making progress. I am sure that everyone in the chamber hopes that we find them.

10:14

**Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD):** In my first members' business debate, which was five years ago this month, I raised the issue of a lack of NHS dentists in my constituency of West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine. That was the first of many debates in which we have discussed and highlighted problems in accessing NHS dental services.

Aberdeenshire continues to have fewer NHS dentists per head of population than anywhere else in the country, so it is not surprising that I and other members who represent Aberdeenshire have continued to raise the issue. However, I am pleased that the Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care has confirmed that the Scottish Executive is taking action to address the problem. My main criticism, which is that it has been a long time coming, is tempered by my delight that action

is forthcoming and is being directed in the right way.

It has been a long haul since we got specific proposals on dentistry into the Liberal Democrat manifesto for the 2003 election, including commitments to introduce free dental checks for all, to ensure that everyone in Scotland has access to NHS dentistry regardless of where they live and to reform the outdated remuneration system for dentists. I say to the SNP that our manifesto also made a commitment to open a third dental school for Scotland, in Aberdeen, to address the long-term lack of dentists, which is a direct result of the disastrous decision of the previous Conservative Government to close the Edinburgh dental school, which we have already heard about.

**Tricia Marwick:** The member should correct me if I am wrong, but has he not been a member of a party that has been part of the Executive since 1999? If his party has a manifesto commitment to open a dental school in Aberdeen, it is taking a gey long time to get round to meeting that commitment.

**Mike Rumbles:** The second stage of the long haul—I say to Tricia Marwick that we are talking about a long haul and not easy soundbites—was to reach agreement with the Labour Party in the coalition partnership agreement. We managed to have all our proposals included, except for the commitment to open a new dental school in Aberdeen. However, it was agreed that the Executive would consult on that proposal during the session. I hope that the minister will confirm in his winding-up speech that he will launch the consultation to open a new dental school—which, after all, would be in his own constituency—and complete it by 2007.

I turn to the dental action plan. When Rhona Brankin announced that plan some eight months ago, in March, I expected swift action. As I said, it is disappointing that we have taken so long to reach the point that we have reached, but I am delighted that, contrary to earlier rumours, the minister has not gone off down the wrong track. I do not blame the minister for those rumours, which came from elsewhere.

Over the past eight months, the Scottish Executive has not reached an agreement with the British Dental Association on the implementation of the dental plan—we have heard the reasons for that. It was rumoured that the Executive would go down the route of simply relying on salaried dentists employed directly by the health boards to implement its dental strategy, which would have been a disastrous way to proceed. I am glad that the minister will not go down that route. Common sense points to engaging with the high street dentist and the Executive is doing so.

The dental plan that was announced in March is good. I said then that if the plan was properly implemented, it should alleviate and solve the problems that we face with NHS dentistry. The plan will cut red tape by reducing the number of items of service that dentists must deal with, reform the remuneration system for dentists and increase funding for the general dental service by 75 per cent. That is double the amount of money that the official Opposition clamoured for, which is ironic. The situation is rather remarkable. The plan will also ensure that public money is used to increase access for NHS patients.

**Mary Scanlon:** Will the member give way?

**Mike Rumbles:** I have already given way and do not have enough time to do so again.

The minister has set a so-called hurdle, but the number of NHS patients that a dentist must have before he or she can access the increased funding has been set very low. That is to be greatly welcomed as a realistic way of increasing access to NHS dentistry for all. A dentist needs a minimum of only 100 non-exempt patients and 400 exempt patients to access the new funding. That is a reasonable commitment to ask of our dentists in return for accessing the increased funding from the Executive.

In the past, I have not been slow to encourage Executive ministers to take action to solve the dental crisis that we face. With the plan, we are now well on the way to solving that crisis. The plan is good and I am pleased that ministers are implementing it sensibly, although we must of course work with the dental profession to overcome any implementation problems in a constructive and positive way. If our aim is to have free dental examinations for all by 2007, it is obvious that we must ensure that everyone has reasonable access to an NHS dentist, no matter where they live in Scotland.

The implementation plan should ensure that the Executive's policy will be effective and I hope that every member will get behind it. We can, of course, continue to improve the service, not least by opening a new dental school in Aberdeen—I am not, of course, prejudging the results of the consultation—but the action plan should result in the most radical reform of NHS dentistry since 1948 and lead to the end of the crisis that has been building in Scotland since the actions of the previous Conservative Government took effect.

I am conscious of the time and will finish by saying that I certainly back the position that the Executive has taken to address the dental crisis in Scotland. I believe that it has clearly made the right judgment and therefore urge colleagues to back the motion in today's vote.



10:21

**Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab):** It is a mark of the Executive's commitment to creating better access to improved dental services that the minister has brought the issue back to the chamber in a year in which we have had a number of debates on dentistry and the announcement of the Executive's £295 million dental action plan, which represents an historic level of funding. I have regularly taken part in these debates with other colleagues from the north-east and the issue is undoubtedly one of concern throughout Scotland.

**Richard Lochhead:** Will the member explain how the concerted campaign by the Labour Party in Grampian to portray dentists as greedy and selfish will help to retain dentists in the NHS and to attract others back into the NHS?

**Richard Baker:** That is a sweeping and inaccurate generalisation. Mr Lochhead should listen to my speech and be informed for once. I will not take any lectures from him on media strategy.

Grampian has one of the lowest rates of dentists per head of population, as Mike Rumbles has said. The time that is spent on NHS dental work is below the average and a number of dental practices have recently gone private. The situation has been vividly portrayed in television pictures of queues of patients snaking round dental practices as they wait to reregister on private dental payment schemes. As a result, many of us have called for local action to improve access to dental services. It is important to highlight that there has been a significant response to that call.

Plans are now in place to build a dental outreach training centre in Aberdeen that will recruit dentists to our area and treat patients. Salaried dentists are already being appointed by NHS Grampian to provide NHS treatment and there has been immediate local investment through the dental action plan.

We also called for national action, which there has been. Not only has there been the action plan but, before it, increased grants for dental practices were made available. Since then, bursaries for students have been introduced to encourage them to practise in the NHS and the number of people applying to study dentistry has increased.

In that context, it is bewildering to see dentists still opting to end the provision of NHS treatment. We hope that today's announcements are the beginning of the end of that. We must recognise in the debate that many dentists are committed to the NHS and provide excellent treatment through the NHS—I have always been keen to highlight that—but more people in the profession must play a greater role in improving access to NHS services and ending the pictures of patients queuing at

practices. It is extremely disappointing that dentists have continued to go private. Only two months ago, in Woodside, in Aberdeen, a long queue of patients waited outside a practice to sign up to a private plan. Many of them, including elderly patients who had been with the practice for decades, started to queue from 7 o'clock in the morning. Before I am criticised for attacking the behaviour of practices, I say that I know that other dentists—whatever their views of the general situation in the past—do not approve of patients being forced to queue in such a way. That is shameful behaviour by those practices.

I spoke to people in the queue at Woodside about the situation and was confronted by a dentist who was not from that practice. He told me that he was there as a friendly colleague to assist the dentist. In fact, he was a director of a firm called Isoplan who has actively encouraged practices to leave the NHS. He has advised dentists who do so to send out letters telling patients that their children will be deregistered if they do not sign up to the payment plan and that the dentists are leaving because of the erosion of funding for NHS dentistry. That is a deceit because, leaving aside all the other grants that are available, fees that were set by an independent panel have risen year on year. It is no wonder that when I held a public meeting in Aberdeen on the issue in the summer, people questioned the commitment of some dentists and their professional bodies to NHS provision, especially when we hear that so much of the funding for the action plan will go to high street dentists. I hope that we can turn things round.

I agree with the professional bodies that the type of work that dentists can do in the NHS, the length of time that they have to do it and the bureaucracy that they have to deal with should be reviewed. However, although dental treatment for children is a priority, many people will find it bewildering that dentists are arguing for more NHS funds for practices that do not have adult NHS patients. NHS funds should be invested in practices providing NHS treatment. We have called for action from the Executive and we have got it. Dentists have asked for more funding and are being offered it. Now we need the profession to engage seriously in constructive negotiations with the Executive and to show that it, too, wants there to be improved access to NHS services. We want to work with the profession; let the profession show that it wants to work with us. The top priority for dentistry in Scotland must be to address the great need that patients have for improved dental health.

10:25

**Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** We have heard a statement from Lewis Macdonald on the Executive's big plan for dental action. Too many times, the Executive has promised to get to grips with the dental crisis in Scotland and I am sure that the people in Tayside and Fife, who have seen their dental service disappear under the Executive, will not be smiling at the latest plans, which appear to be little more than a sticking plaster for the problems of dentistry.

The point has already been made in the debate that it does the Executive no favours at all that it has failed to engage properly with the British Dental Association and has, instead, indulged in soundbites and posturing and attacked dentists. Already this morning, we have heard people accusing dentists of being greedy and selfish. That does nothing to help the debate.

**The Minister for Health and Community Care (Mr Andy Kerr):** Does the member agree that our strategy has received widespread support, including the support of all consultants in dental public health, all clinical directors of dentistry, the chairman of the Scottish Dental Practice Board and the Scottish Consumer Council? How does that support fit with the comments that the member has just made?

**Murdo Fraser:** If I may, I will quote from the chairman of the BDA's Scottish dental practice committee. He said:

"Health ministers seem determined to force their views on dentists, issuing statements and press releases with no attempt to discuss these complex issues with representatives of the profession."

**Mr Kerr:** That is not about the strategy.

**Murdo Fraser:** That is a quotation of something Robert Donald said, which the minister will be familiar with.

There is a convenient scapegoat for the members of the Executive parties who are desperate to displace blame for the crisis that has occurred over the past six years. What do they pick on? The closure of the dental school. Dr Elaine Murray was gracious enough to accept that, at the time, the industry wanted the dental school to be closed because it was concerned about the oversupply of dentists. As we well know, the problem is not to do with the lack of dentists in training but to do with the retention of dentists in the NHS. Only 3 per cent of dental undergraduates say that they are considering a full-time career in the NHS. The problem is not the lack of dentists being trained, but the lack of dentists who want to go into the NHS.

**Lewis Macdonald:** I agree that retaining dentists in the NHS is a critical issue, but will the member accept that the BDA shares our view that there must also be an increase in the total number of dentists?

**Murdo Fraser:** I quite accept that the BDA now says that there needs to be an increase in the total number of dentists. However, I remind the members of the Executive parties that the Executive has been in power for six and a half years and it is time that it moved on from blaming all the ills of Scottish society on the previous Conservative Government, which was in power eight and a half years ago. Let us end the blame displacement.

With regard to NHS dental services in Tayside and Fife, Tricia Marwick unearthed some figures that show the shocking truth. In 2004-05, 4,537 patients were withdrawn from NHS registration in Tayside. The situation is worse in Fife, where 10,540 patients were withdrawn from NHS registration. There has been a mass exodus. In fact, more than half of all patients who were withdrawn from NHS registration in 2004-05 came from Tayside and Fife. That meltdown in Tayside and Fife underlines the crisis that is happening across Scotland.

This summer, the local dental practice in my home town, Alyth, in Tayside closed down permanently, leaving no dentist in the town. Nobody in the town can remember any time when Alyth did not have its own dentist. In 2004, a new dental practice was opened in Dunfermline in Fife. When it opened, hundreds of local residents queued for hours to register. I understand that that is by no means a unique experience. Surely it proves that the Executive must do more to deliver affordable dental care.

Earlier this week, I was in Thurso—in Jamie Stone's constituency—with the Enterprise and Culture Committee. One of the issues that we were discussing was economic development and ways in which people could be attracted to come and live in the area. In that regard, the issue of access to NHS dentistry was raised. We were told that people in Thurso face a round trip of more than 200 miles to find a dentist. Such quality-of-life issues are vital to our attempts to attract people to live in rural areas. They will do that only if they have access to decent services. We cannot consider problems in isolation. If we are to try to address population decline, we have to be aware of other problems.

I want to deal with the NHS recruiting Polish dentists. I have nothing against Poles and I welcome the arrival in January 2006 of 32 Polish dentists, six of whom will be employed in Fife. However, that is only a quick fix for shortages in dentistry.

In case there is any doubt about the politics of the situation that we are discussing, I will quote Alex Falconer, who was Labour MEP for Mid Scotland and Fife until 1999. Earlier this year, he wrote to the *Dunfermline Press and West of Fife Advertiser*, saying:

"I have two health problems. One is my ear. Under the Tories, I saw a consultant within three months at the Queen Margaret. My other problem is asbestos pleural plaques. Under the Tories, I saw a chest consultant once a year at the Queen Margaret.

After eight years of Labour, I have now waited over six months to see an ear consultant at the Victoria. I also have to travel to the Victoria to see the chest consultant.

Also under the Tories, I had an NHS dentist. Now I don't have one and the prospect of getting one is remote."

That is from a gentleman who was an elected Labour politician but who is now making statements against his own party. The minister does not need the Tories to tell him what is wrong; he can listen to his own representatives.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh):** Jim Wallace will be followed by Marilyn Livingstone. I might have to cut the time allocation for speakers after Mr Wallace.

10:32

**Mr Jim Wallace (Orkney) (LD):** It was interesting to listen to Murdo Fraser, who was long on criticism and totally bereft of—I cannot even say "short on"—any constructive proposals as to what to do.

In contrast to what we heard from the Conservatives, we heard from the minister a welcome announcement that fleshes out the action plan that was launched by Rhona Brankin in March, committing some £295 million of additional money to dental services, the bulk of which is going to primary dental care.

As many speakers have indicated, people in many parts of the country have problems accessing dentistry and my constituency of Orkney is no exception. It has been a number of years since the only independent practice announced that it was going private, which put a great deal of pressure on the NHS system. That practice left Orkney and we are now solely dependent on the NHS salaried service. Of course, that means that there are some patients who were previously with the independent practice who are still waiting to go on a list and that those who come to the county have a long time to wait before they can get on a list. I agree with Murdo Fraser's point about the economic implications of that. If we are trying to attract people to come to an area for reasons of economic development, a key factor will be what kind of medical and dental

care they can get. There is an important economic dimension to the issue.

Undoubtedly, the problem is one of recruitment. When the independent practice went private, it was not as if there was a lack of support from the Government. Funding was available, but there was a problem in trying to recruit people to fill the gaps.

Murdo Fraser's defence of the closure of the Edinburgh dental school is all very well, but we simply cannot get dentists as easily as turning on a tap; there are lead times. Therefore, decisions that were taken to close the dental school in the late 1980s and early 1990s have an impact many years down the track. That is why the Executive is addressing the situation by expanding the intake of dental students, by establishing outreach centres in Inverness and Aberdeen and by consulting on a new dental school in Aberdeen. Although we realise that those measures cannot produce dental graduates overnight, we know that it is important that we take steps such as establishing the post-graduate fellowship in remote and rural dentistry.

**Richard Lochhead:** Does the member acknowledge the urgent need for a decision on an Aberdeen dental school? England is to establish a new dental school, which will create competition for the few professionals who could teach at the Aberdeen school.

**Mr Wallace:** The SNP has come slightly late to the argument for a new dental school in Aberdeen. A new dental school in England might not necessarily be a problem, because a substantial number of students come from England to Scottish dental schools as a result of the lack of places in England. If a new dental school in England meant more scope for Scottish students to enter Scottish dental schools, that might well be to our long-term benefit.

Golden hellos have been given and the deputy minister talked about a bursary scheme. All such measures have been directed towards the encouragement and recruitment of dentists.

**Shona Robison:** Will the member give way?

**Mr Wallace:** No—I want to make progress.

It is important to retain dentists in the national health service. My constituents depend totally on the salaried dental service. In his opening speech, the deputy minister said:

"there is a place for a salaried service".

I welcome that. When Mr Kerr replies to the debate, I hope that he will say more about the salaried service. The people who are involved in that are committed to the national health service. After a couple of years, a newly qualified dentist in

private practice can earn twice the maximum that can be paid to a salaried dentist. That is an issue if we are to retain dentists in the salaried system.

We cannot allow a system to grow up in which salaried dentists might gain the impression that they are seen as a second tier—I know that that is not the minister's intention. We must underline that the value of such dentists to those whom they serve is primary. What steps are being taken to encourage salaried dentists to remain in the NHS and what further commitment payments might be made available to them?

The issue of facilities goes hand in hand with that of salaried dentists. We have heard about the efforts that are being made to help with facilities in the independent sector, but if more salaried dentists are to be appointed, facilities will be required in the national health service. In Orkney, after the clinic in Stromness that is due for completion next year is ready, not much scope will be available to establish many new salaried posts, although they are needed. Orkney NHS Board has made a bid to build more surgeries in Orkney. Three additional surgeries would allow two or three more salaried practitioners to be recruited and would provide the opportunity to undertake some of the training work that is needed, which allows something better to be offered in recruitment.

New centres for therapists are being established in Aberdeen and Inverness. We should ensure that similar incentives to those for dental practitioners, such as remote and rural allowances, are provided to encourage therapists and hygienists to accept posts in our remote and rural areas.

A number of people who are well qualified as dentists in their own countries—in Asia, for example—have applied for jobs here in professions that are ancillary to dentistry but have had difficulty in obtaining visas.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You must close now.

**Mr Wallace:** I ask the minister whether he can do anything to fast-track that process.

I welcome what has been announced—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** No—you must close.

**Mr Wallace:** However, I would also welcome assurances from the minister about the salaried sector.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Speeches from now on will be five minutes each.

10:38

**Marilyn Livingstone (Kirkcaldy) (Lab):** I thank the Presiding Officer for the opportunity to contribute to this important debate. As we have heard, the developing issue of access to a dentist is becoming an increasing concern, particularly to many of my constituents and to people the length and breadth of Fife. I am constantly approached at surgeries and meetings in my constituency about dentists deregistering their patients. The most recent figure is that the registrations of nearly 11,000 people throughout Fife has been withdrawn. We are becoming aware of the reasons for that, but knowing the reasons does not make the situation more palatable.

As we have heard, the dentists involved will offer only private dental treatment at a cost that many cannot afford. That is impacting on the most vulnerable in the community. Many of my constituents who have received letters about deregistration have told me that they are concerned and anxious and that they cannot pay. Like the minister, I am concerned about the problems that we are storing up. Only this week, an increase in oral cancer cases has been reported, particularly among young women. We must ensure that dentistry is available to all, regardless of the ability to pay.

The Tory contribution has been astonishing. The closure of the Edinburgh dental school has had a major impact on the number of dentists today. As Jim Wallace said, a magic wand cannot be waved to conjure up new dentists; recruiting them takes time and commitment. We are suffering from the legacy that we were left by the Tory years—the changes that the Tories made to the NHS and their deregulation policy. However, we are where we are.

What can we do and what are we doing? I pay tribute to the dentists in my constituency who have continued to work in the NHS. The new dental practice in Templehall, which Gordon Brown opened earlier this year, has registered 1,500 NHS patients and hopes to accept another 1,500 when it fills its vacancies for dentists. The number of people who tried to register with that NHS dental practice was astonishing.

I very much welcome the seven-surgery dental access centre in Kirkcaldy, which is expected to become operational in mid-January 2006. Like Jim Wallace, I think that we should get away from a two-tier system. It would be appropriate to examine remuneration for dentists who are committed to the NHS. I also hope that the seven Polish dentists who will join the dental workforce in February will help to fill gaps.

I welcome the access clinics, which provide short courses of treatment to fix problems with

fillings, broken dentures and so on. However, the solution is that people should have access to their own dentists.

I thank all those who are involved in the triage service in Fife, which is funded through the community dental service. That operation employs between 16 and 20 people and provides a good service to the people of Fife. Emergency services are provided at the weekend through a rota system. However, my constituents need access to NHS dentists. On behalf of my constituents and patients throughout Fife, I ask the minister to make Fife a designated area, so that we can benefit from the additional Executive funding that that would bring, which we need. The figures stack up.

I welcome the commitment that the deputy minister gave to provide funding to support primary care dentists. I also welcome the action plan that Rhona Brankin introduced and which Lewis Macdonald has fleshed out today. Dentists are asking for more money, more dentists and more help with capital funding. I welcome the additional funding of £30 million for capital, £29 million for oral health and £37 million to support primary care dental services. We should not apologise for rewarding dentists who stay in the national health. My constituents find it confusing to see newspaper headlines about incomes for some dental practitioners when they are sent letters to inform them that they have been deregistered.

The action plan will go a long way towards solving the problem. We need to increase the number of dentists in the health service and to increase training. I support the motion in the deputy minister's name.

10:43

**Tricia Marwick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP):** When I read the first line of the motion, which says:

"That the Parliament notes the widespread concern about loss of access to NHS dentists",

I thought about the words "widespread concern". In Fife, there is more than widespread concern; there is anger, fury and bewilderment that so many people have been deregistered in the past year. Other members have referred to the figures that I extracted from the Executive, which show that 10,500 patients in Fife were deregistered last year. That is a third of the total who were deregistered in Scotland. Fife NHS Board can offer only an emergency service to a 77-year-old woman in Kirkcaldy who simply cannot access a dentist. The deputy minister's response to my asking what advice I could give her was to complain about the dentist who deregistered her.

The crisis has been a long time in the making. I fully accept that the closure of the Edinburgh

dental school created problems, but I say to Labour and Liberal Democrat members that the Executive has been in power since 1999. This crisis has not appeared suddenly. It is the result not just of the fact that not enough dentists are coming through, but of the fact that we are losing the dentists that we have. We are in this situation because the NHS cannot retain them. In Fife, there is no doubt about the fact that we are in crisis.

**Lewis Macdonald:** Does the member accept that dentists have business decisions to make and that the decision to deregister a patient is taken by their dentist alone?

**Tricia Marwick:** I accept that totally. However, the minister is responsible for the NHS in Scotland and has a duty to ensure that NHS treatment is available to those who want and need it. No one can need it more than a 77-year-old woman who does not have access to the kind of money that would allow her to have private care. It is for the sake of such 77-year-old women that we need to have this debate and to continue to push the Executive on the issue.

When I first read the Executive's action plan, I thought that it meant that from 2005 onwards all old-age pensioners would be entitled to a free oral health examination. I want the minister to listen to this point, because I expect a response to it when he sums up. At the time, I thought that I would ask the minister what he would say to the 77-year-old woman whom I have mentioned. However, during today's debate I read the action plan more closely. It says that from 2005 onwards, NHS adult patients aged 60 and over will be offered a free oral health examination. That means that people must be patients to be eligible. The 77-year-old woman who has been deregistered has no dentist to carry out the examination for her.

I turn to the problem of recruitment. I have been contacted by a number of dentists in Fife. One obstacle to recruiting people as dentists is the entrance criteria. I understand that dental schools require five As at first sitting in fifth year. Most pupils who achieve such results do not come from our state schools. We must increase the number of people who have the opportunity to become dentists, because I am sure that, after they qualify, the commitment of such people to the NHS will be greater than that of others.

Shona Robison referred to the "foghorn diplomacy" that we have seen recently. The minister will have received the same e-mail that I picked up this morning. It is addressed to Mr Macdonald and is from an extremely hard-working dentist in Fife. She has 1,700 NHS patients and is absolutely furious about the misconceptions and misinterpretations that have appeared in the press over the past few days. She writes:

"I was told that you held a press conference and that the information they were given was misleading ... I feel that you have an obligation to TELL THE TRUTH and to correct this misinformation that has been printed as many of the public will take it as being gospel and factual. I am not going to put up with people coming in every day now saying that I am loaded, when I work hard for what I earn and this is the surest way of many more of us going PRIVATE and reducing our patient base which may perhaps be what you actually want us to do? Today is the closest I have come to saying that I have had enough!!!"

That dentist has 1,700 NHS patients, is treating them, is working hard and is sick to death of the misinformation that is being put into the public domain by ministers. It is about time that we recognised the hard work of NHS dentists and did everything we can to retain them.

10:49

**Alex Fergusson (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con):** We last debated this subject on 21 April, in the unfortunate circumstances of the run-up to a general election. I had hoped that the somewhat calmer political circumstances surrounding today's debate would lead to a more constructive approach, but I am not convinced that they have. A constructive approach is what the vast majority of my constituents in Galloway and Upper Nithsdale, who currently have no access to any form of dental service, let alone NHS dentistry, urgently require and assuredly deserve. I care about them every bit as deeply as Dr Murray does.

Like Tricia Marwick, I am somewhat bemused by the opening sentence in the motion that is before us this morning. As Mike Rumbles pointed out, since the earliest days of the Parliament, rural members from all parties have increasingly drawn Parliament's attention to the issue. However, it was not until 17 March this year that Rhona Brankin, the then Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care, uttered the first words on dentistry in the Parliament, after almost six years of its existence. In response to questions following her statement that day, she said:

"The package that I have announced today will encourage people to come into NHS dentistry, it will encourage dentists to stay in NHS dentistry and I hope that it will encourage dentists who have gone into private practice to come back into NHS dentistry. I am confident that the package that I have announced today will do just that."—[*Official Report*, 17 March 2005; c 15542.]

She must be very relieved that she was reshuffled, so that she does not have to lead today's debate.

**Dr Murray:** Will the member give way?

**Alex Fergusson:** My time has been cut, so I cannot take an intervention.

The stark reality is that eight months on from Rhona Brankin's statement, an increasing number

of practitioners are leaving the NHS, none has returned and surveys continue to show that 3 per cent of dental students intend to practise full time in the NHS. I welcome the bursary arrangements that the minister has announced, but I suspect that after five years the trend for people to leave will continue.

We have now reached the sorry situation that my local health board, Dumfries and Galloway NHS Board, is hoping to be allocated a number of Polish dentists from the second tranche of imported professionals. I share Elaine Murray's plea for the Executive to look on that bid sympathetically when it comes in.

The board is also seeking to place a highly lucrative contract with a private company, Integrated Dental Holdings, to establish a number of NHS practices across the region. One of those is likely to be in Newton Stewart in my constituency, to service the west of the region. That is fine, but what does it say to the one remaining dentist in Newton Stewart who still deals mostly with NHS patients? I could tell members what he thinks about it, but I do not have time to do so. Members should take my word that he e-mailed me on the subject yesterday in order to make me aware of the strong distaste that he feels for the way in which the Executive has treated him. He highlighted the fact that the new primary dental services contract and the large number of incentives with which IDH will be tempted north of the border will hugely disadvantage existing NHS dentists, who until today have been offered virtually no support to ensure that they remain NHS dentists. Like Roseanna Cunningham, I await with interest my constituent's reaction to today's announcements by the minister.

The sad conclusion that I draw is that there is virtually nothing to suggest that any of the Executive's actions, well intentioned though they may be—I believe them to be well intentioned—will lead to any improvement in the delivery of NHS dental services in remote rural areas. Members from all parties have drawn attention to that point today. The time may have come for us to differentiate between how dental services are delivered in remote rural areas and how they are delivered elsewhere.

I suggest constructively that the Executive indulges in a bit of blue-sky thinking on this desperately important subject. It will have to encourage, rather than bully, the dental profession to think laterally, too. The answer to the problem may lie in the Canadian model of rural dental practice to which I referred in April's debate. The idea is not new, it works and it accepts the absolute fact that, for historic, social and economic reasons, newly qualified dentists will always tend to congregate in our major centres of population.

Under the Canadian model of care, most dental services are provided by therapists, hygienists, prosthetic technicians and dental health educators, who are largely locally recruited and trained. The dental practitioner carries out an initial examination, determines the dental plan and performs only the more complex treatments. He or she covers a wide area and has a very large number of patients under his or her umbrella. However, the practitioner's expertise is maximised and the local training of the allied professionals provides a welcome layer of quality employment for many young people—who currently in Scotland have to go elsewhere to seek work.

The problem calls for radical thinking and acceptance that Polish dentists and corporate investment do not provide a long-term solution to it. I commend the Canadian model warmly to the chamber.

10:54

**Eleanor Scott (Highlands and Islands) (Green):** Of course I welcome any investment in dental services and the principle that a commitment to the NHS by dentists will be rewarded. However, I am concerned about the fact that dentists themselves must be on board. Earlier there were a few raised eyebrows when the British Dental Association was described as a trade union. It is a trade union, in the same way that the British Medical Association is, although it is not Trades Union Congress affiliated.

I mentioned the British Medical Association. It may be interesting to make some comparisons between these two closely related professions, which have a similar method of training and similar regulation, but which seem to have taken different paths over the years. To an extent, some of what the minister announced indicates a convergence of those paths. For example, an announcement was made on the payment of notional rent for dental premises that are owned by the practices. General medical practitioners have been able to claim such a payment for many years; the practice in which I was a trainee in 1979 was paid a notional rent for the premises that it owned. The measure is a very late catch-up for something that already happens for doctors.

I am not unsympathetic to the sentiment behind Carolyn Leckie's amendment, because I know that there have been scenes of people queuing to register for dentists. That people should have to do that is clearly unacceptable. If something is unacceptable in Scotland today we condemn it, but I hope that we also look to see why it happened. Condemnation is not enough; it is necessary to sort out the root causes.

Dental debates tend to have a bit of déjà vu about them. I went back to the Scottish Parliament

information centre figures that I looked at for the previous debate on dentistry. The figures show that, as other members have said, there is a clear problem with the retention of dentists. The figures for 2003 were the last figures given; they indicate that in that year, 83 dentists under the age of 55 left NHS practice in Scotland. The paragraph underneath the figures states that it is surmised

"that this could be due to dentists taking a career break or leaving Scotland."

That suggests that it is not just that dentists do not have a commitment to the NHS—they are losing their commitment to the profession or certainly to practising that profession in Scotland. We must seriously address that matter.

Although I welcome dentists from overseas, such as the Polish dentists who have been mentioned, we cannot plunder the rest of the world to meet our dentistry needs; we must grow our own and we must keep them once we have grown them.

I would be interested to know what proportion of vocational training places will be in remote and rural areas. As I come from the Highlands and Islands, I obviously have concerns about the issue. I will go further than that because it has been shown—I am talking about doctors but I am sure that the point is transferable to dentists—that if students are recruited from those areas they are much more likely to go back and work there.

There is also an issue about how the profession is portrayed. I am sure that if a potential school leaver in Wick or Thurso says that they fancy studying dentistry they will get, at the least, a ribbing from their school fellows. The profession has an image problem, which it is in all our interests to address. Some comments that have been made have not been helpful.

I note the minister's announcement that the £9,000 for rural practitioners will be extended to other deprived areas. Although I do not condemn that step, because I recognise the needs in those areas, I do not want it to dilute the commitment to direct dentists to rural areas. The problems of people being able to access a dentist are the same in rural areas as they are anywhere else, but there is the additional problem that in order to do that they might have to make a 200-mile round trip—as has been said. That is a serious issue.

I recognise what the Executive has done on the allied dental professions. I hope that that initiative can be expanded, because I see that as a way forward in the provision of some services. I echo Alex Fergusson's comments about recruiting those people from and training them within the areas in which they will work. The end product is not the number of people who deliver dental care; it is the dental health of the population. If we can promote

that in ways other than by throwing more dentists at the problem, that is welcome.

The targets in the action plan are modest. For example, by 2010, 60 per cent of five-year-olds should have no signs of dental disease. That means, however, that we expect 40 per cent of children born this year to have dental disease when they start school. The 60 per cent target is modest and it should be more than achievable.

10:59

**Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab):** The minister has made some useful announcements this morning. However, we must address a set of fundamental questions about the shape of the service that we are trying to provide in Scotland.

Let us be clear that there is no guarantee of access to general dental services in the same way as there is to general medical services, and there has not been for a considerable period. In that context, the question that we must address is how we can best integrate private dental services with the dental services that are provided under the NHS. That issue must be addressed properly, without some of the catcalling and name calling that has taken place in the chamber today and in recent weeks. Let us be clear that there will be private dentistry and NHS dentistry for years to come. We must work out how we can make the two systems work together in the best interests of patients.

We must also address the general oral health of the population. It is fair enough for members from rural areas to highlight the problems there, but the worst oral health problems in Scotland are in the west of Scotland, in places such as Clydebank. When we discuss what our policy should be for dentistry and oral health in Scotland, I want the needs of my constituents to be considered close to the top of the tree, because those needs are greatest. For me, the test of the measures that the minister introduces will be how well they work in deprived areas in Scotland in particular. I welcome the £9,000 allowance that will now go to practitioners in deprived areas. I ask the minister exactly what he means by deprived areas, how those areas will qualify and how dentists can be certain that their practice will qualify. That will be a real consideration for dentists in areas such as mine, who might be considering whether to stay or to move out. I urge the minister to give us the clearest possible indication of how the deprived-area payments will work.

It is also important that the minister has announced today that mechanisms and initiatives on oral health, such as the initiative on toothbrushes, will be funded. I would like more

targeted support for oral health to go to areas such as Glasgow, Clydebank and Greenock, which is represented by my colleague Duncan McNeil. When we talk about the health of Scotland, those areas and those initiatives are crucial. The issue is not only about dentists and payments to dentists; it is about how we get parents and children in those areas to maintain their dental health. I do not want people to need fillings and extractions; I want them to have healthy teeth. I want dentists in my area to practice conservative dentistry—

**Alex Fergusson:** A laudable sentiment.

**Des McNulty:** That is not necessarily Alex Fergusson's form of conservatism; I mean cautious and preventive dentistry. I want dentists to have the time and capacity to help people to maintain oral health.

I brought dentists from my constituency and other deprived constituencies to meet the minister recently. We all emphasised the point that the current fee system, which is based on treatments, does not lend itself to the approach that I have outlined. I hope that the minister will greatly simplify how dentists are paid and rewarded. I also want him to highlight how dental businesses—they are businesses—can be supported to have the important facilities that practices need, such as effective decontamination facilities.

We must also consider how dental practices pass from one practitioner to another. Many dental practitioners are getting towards the end of their career and they want to know how their assets—the practice premises, good will, their lists and so on—can be transferred on.

I hope that when the minister responds he will address some of those important points.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We go now to closing speeches. I call Carolyn Leckie to close for the Scottish Socialist Party. Time is now very tight, so you have six minutes.

11:04

**Carolyn Leckie:** Thank you very much, Presiding Officer. The debate has been useful and there have been many good speeches. Unusually, some of the best have come from the Labour benches. I will return to that point.

It is important to look at the situation in Lanarkshire, as it flags up certain anomalies. Lanarkshire has probably the second poorest oral health record in Scotland, but it is managing to increase steadily the registration of patients with NHS dentists. That says a lot, not only about the urban nature of Lanarkshire, but about the culture of dentistry there, which is reflected in its community dentistry service and the number of salaried dentists in Lanarkshire NHS Board. That



situation exposes as a myth the claim that there is a universal crisis in dentistry in Scotland in terms of rewards, as the BDA sees it. What does that tell us about dentistry in rural areas and the demands of certain dentists, who say that they are not getting enough money? The example of Lanarkshire, where registration is increasing, shows that such claims are not accurate and that we must dig beneath them.

Des McNulty is right about oral health in areas such as Lanarkshire, where only 30 per cent of children aged five are free of dental decay, which is less than halfway towards the Executive's target. That is a shameful statistic and we must turn that situation round urgently. Even within Lanarkshire, there are gross inequalities. For example, in the past year, 700 five-year-olds in Lanarkshire have had gross decay or abscesses that required urgent treatment. Seven hundred children aged five have had to go through that traumatic experience—that is unacceptable.

There are however, massive disparities between different areas. For example, whereas only 1 per cent of five-year-olds in Cumbernauld and Kilsyth needed urgent treatment for decay and abscesses in the past year, 33 per cent of five-year-olds in Airdrie and Coatbridge required such treatment. That is unacceptable. There is no excuse for it, because it clearly can be addressed. There is no fundamental difference between the weans of Cumbernauld and the weans of Airdrie and Coatbridge. We must—and can—do much more to remove that disparity.

This Executive is positioned to the right of Thatcher on health policy—there has been more privatisation under Labour than there was under Thatcher. Despite that political positioning, it is becoming a wee bit of a regular phenomenon to see the Executive being attacked from the right from both sides of the chamber. That demonstrates the SNP's trajectory: it supports privatisation in the NHS and, as we saw during yesterday's debate in the chamber, the temperance movement.

Murdo Fraser—my heart bleeds—berated speakers for calling dentists greedy and selfish. I do not remember anybody—apart from Mudro Fraser—using that phrase. Similarly, I remember only the Tories using that phrase when they were talking about firefighters, nursery nurses, NHS workers, civil servants or—dare I say it—miners. The Tories called them all greedy and selfish. I am sure that those workers would have benefited from a white coat and a drill to save them from such attacks. I certainly do not take any lectures from the Tories about workers.

Our amendment offers three immediate and practical measures to address the dentistry problem. The amendment is neither a panacea nor a revolutionary manifesto.

**Stewart Stevenson:** Why not?

**Carolyn Leckie:** Because Mr Stevenson is just not up to listening to it.

Our amendment is based on the majority of the responses to the Executive's consultation. The amendment refers to widening access. Tricia Marwick made a good contribution on that when she referred to an elite. There are unnecessary academic barriers to entering dentistry that preserve the profession as an elite one. One of the ways of breaking that down—and producing dentists who have a commitment to the NHS—is to allow people to get into dentistry whose background is that they have fought for the NHS. That can be done by lowering the unnecessary academic barriers and supporting such people in their education. That takes us into the territory of the grants system, bursaries and the taxation question. I do not believe that the Executive's initiative goes far enough, but I will not go down that road.

The other suggested measure in our amendment is for dentists to make a basic commitment to work for the NHS, under a salaried scheme, for at least five years after qualifying. I do not think that that is too much to ask. It should not be done by using a carrot; it should be a demand, a commitment and a condition within an agreed salary structure.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I now call Jamie Stone to close for the Liberal Democrats. Again, you have a strict six minutes.

11:10

**Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD):** Thank you very much, Presiding Officer. As is the custom, I will comment briefly on the main speeches in the debate. After that, I will make two pertinent points about my constituency that I have drawn from the debate.

The Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care, Lewis Macdonald, gave us good news indeed. There will be increased funding, which is allegedly greater than what the Opposition parties asked for—it is a record funding package. The minister talked about nursery school tooth-brushing projects, the bursary scheme—more of that anon—and the increase in remote areas allowances. Those are welcome bits of news, as far as I am concerned.

Shona Robison pointed out the importance of dentists agreeing to the package. That poses a question for Carolyn Leckie, who talked about negotiations and spoke several times about “facing them down”. That takes us to the nub of the problem. In this day and age, a negotiation is an agreement between two parties and a meeting

of minds. The devil is in the detail for the Executive, but what it is attempting is laudable. My colleague Euan Robson said that we must all now go out as ambassadors of the Parliament and plead with dentists to get back into the NHS system and take on NHS patients. By doing that, we can help the ministers in their laudable endeavour.

Nanette Milne referred—not once or twice, but three or four times—to angry dentists. I have to say that, although her point might be valid to her, we are getting in our postbags letters from angry patients and constituents. Surely our first and foremost duty is to those people. If we forget that, we are forgetting why our electorate put us here. That must be uppermost in all our minds.

Euan Robson, in a lighter aside, announced that he would not like to be a dentist peering into our mouths. I certainly say amen to that. We would not like him to do so. However, he raised the issue of the Polish dentists joining the Polish community in Scotland. I thought that that was a nice way of putting it. Poles and other nationalities have been joining this country for many years and they are very welcome. I must be careful what I say, but I just hope that Polish dentists who come to Scotland get slightly better treatment than appears to have been dished out to some doctors in my constituency. Because that matter is sub judice, I will not go any further at this stage.

Elaine Murray referred to Polish dentists, too, and Roseanna Cunningham, in an amazingly clairvoyant speech, predicted that I would mention them. She obviously knows me far better than I realised. Mike Rumbles made a predictable but entirely laudable speech on the subject of the new dental school in Aberdeen. I think that we all hope that the consultation exercise will have a positive result.

I ask members to consider a suggestion. When the Conservatives argued that the problem is not that there are not enough dentists, my response was, “Hang on a minute.” If the number of dentists is increased, there will eventually be dentists who cannot get into the private sector and who will then come into the public sector. It is worth thinking about a saturation attempt. There is work to be done on that front. I do not necessarily subscribe to that position, but it should at least be considered.

In fairness to Murdo Fraser, I should say that he made one good point, which was echoed by Jim Wallace. That point was how on earth we can attract people to Orkney, Shetland and Caithness if we cannot offer quality public services. Ministers will know that that is what lies behind my thinking on maternity services, which is an issue for another day. Jim Wallace also rightly pointed out that we must not forget the value of the salaried

dentist and the disparity between the apparent rewards of the salaried and the non-salaried.

Jim Wallace also referred, properly, to the subject of visas for foreign nationals. There was a very sad case in my constituency. It concerned a Syrian—members can understand how difficult things would be for him in the present circumstances. He was a dental technician. We badly need such services in Scotland, yet we could not help him. More is the pity, he had to return to Syria. His personal circumstances were very sad, but I will not say anything further about that.

Alex Fergusson talked about blue-sky thinking and the Canadian model. We could all agree that the more we can think our way out of problems, the better.

In concluding, I will raise the two points that I hinted I would raise. First, I again welcome the bursary scheme. I assume that it will be centrally controlled in as much as it will be administered via the dental schools, but will ministers consider whether health boards—or whatever they come to be called in years to come—will be able at least to have some input? Boards should be able to tell dental schools that they desperately need a dentist in, for example, Orkney or Shetland.

The second point concerns travelling dentists. I know that issues arise to do with decontamination of equipment, but work could be done on that. Individual health authorities have considered the issue over the years, although perhaps in a slightly piecemeal way. When we consider the size of areas such as Dumfries and Galloway, Sutherland, Ross-shire, the outer isles and the northern isles, it is clear that the issue should be revisited.

I would be grateful if ministers could come back to me with their thinking on bursary schemes. The idea is highly constructive. In another place, something similar has been done for the armed forces. Getting somebody's time is part of the deal. I would be interested to know about contractual obligations and about how the system would work. Ministers should remember that we can target people if we get input from the health authorities.

When professionals come to live in Caithness, my constituency, they may spend some time there, meet a local girl, marry and become enamoured of the golf courses. They very often stay and that is what we want.

11:17

**Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):**

I acknowledge Des McNulty's measured contribution, in which he wondered about the

private and NHS sectors working together. He also made another crucial point, which has been lost in the debate. He pointed out that, although Glasgow has the highest number of dentists per head of population, it has the worst dental record in Scotland. On the other side of the coin, Grampian has the lowest number of dentists per head for children, yet the region has the best dental record in Scotland. We have to consider the wider context—not only the number of dentists, but how we can achieve an excellent level of health care, especially for children.

Many members have mentioned the BDA. I regret that, after yesterday's long debate, I saw the BDA's briefing only this morning. However, it is worth pointing out some points that the association makes. It says:

"This move towards private care is prompted by lack of investment in NHS dentistry and frustrations with the current NHS system, including the lack of time dentists can spend with patients offering preventative advice and the type of materials they are allowed to use."

Whether that is right or wrong, we have to work with the BDA. Let us consider partnerships and outcomes and results.

The briefing also says:

"The growth of private care is also driven by the availability of new clinical procedures and heightened patient demand for treatments such as white fillings and tooth-coloured crowns that may not be available on the NHS."

Like every other profession, dentistry is demand driven as well as supply driven.

When Labour has nothing to say, it blames the Tories. By May next year, Labour will have been in government for eight years. Labour members have to be a bit grown-up and start taking responsibility for the decisions that they have made.

**Murdo Fraser:** Nine years.

**Mary Scanlon:** Yes, it will be nine years.

Over three years, £295 million will be invested. However, the central questions that were raised by all sides at the beginning of this debate have still not been answered. How much will the fee for NHS dental services be increased to cover the cost of treatment and to keep dentists in the NHS? I listened carefully to Lewis Macdonald. The reduction from 400 to 50 in the number of items covered by the item of service fee is welcome, as it will reduce bureaucracy. He also mentioned root canal treatment. I remember being told by a dentist that it cost more than £200 to carry out that treatment, yet the fee for the service at that time was less than £50. I am sure that there are many other similar examples. Are dentists being paid properly or are they having to subsidise the service?

The minister cannot guarantee that any general dental practitioners who have moved out of the NHS to the private sector will come back.

**Lewis Macdonald rose—**

**Mary Scanlon:** Let me finish the point.

There has been more investment, but more than half of it is crucial and much-needed funding for work on infection, contamination standards and training. In other words, more than 50 per cent of the investment is to stand still.

**Lewis Macdonald:** As was announced in March, we will be addressing dentists' remuneration next year. Does Mary Scanlon welcome the additional £37 million for primary care dental services that I announced today?

**Mary Scanlon:** I would welcome anything. However, the minister has not come forward with any information so that Roseanna Cunningham and I—and others—can say to people, "Don't you worry. Your NHS dentist is not going to leave now. Ministers have made sure they will be paid. All will be well." We have not been given the reassurances that we have sought.

Many members, including Carolyn Leckie, have spoken about the earnings of dentists in private practice—around £120,000. However, that does not take into account the costs of running a business, as Des McNulty said. Those costs cover staff, insurance, heating, lighting, training, administration and borrowing, among many other things.

I would have hoped to hear, before £300 million was allocated, some commitment from the dental profession for the measures that ministers have negotiated. The minister said little about free dental check-ups. When giving evidence to the Health Committee, Professor Tim Newton said:

"the Executive is unlikely to be able to fulfil the promise to deliver on the check-ups."—[*Official Report, Health Committee*, 1 February 2005; c 1594.]

He had surveyed almost 3,000 dentists.

The system much lauded by Mike Rumbles will only give people an assessment of what needs to be done, tell them how long they have to wait to get it done and advise them of the cost of the treatment, which for many will be prohibitive. Six months later they will get another dental check-up to tell them the same thing again. The dental check-up is welcome, but it is certainly not the whole answer. The BDA says that it needs an increase of £348 million a year: how much will £295 million over three years achieve?

11:23

**Stewart Stevenson (Banff and Buchan) (SNP):** One of the dangers in debates such as this

is that we oversimplify the issue. We all have to concede that it is immensely complex.

In an especially interesting and relevant contribution, Des McNulty referred to the underachievement in oral health in his constituency. I accept his points; they were absolutely true. Nonetheless, in the greater Glasgow area, there are 7.48 dentists for each 10,000 of population—the highest ratio in Scotland. The issue is much more complex than taking a simple measure of the number of dentists. However, we cannae do it without dentists, so it is important that we talk about the numbers.

In the area that I represent—Grampian—we have just over half the number of dentists for each 10,000 of population that people in the greater Glasgow area have. Our figure is 3.9. Elaine Murray's concerns over the issue are graphically illustrated by the fact that her area is at the very bottom of the table, with a figure of 3.46. In areas where there are few dentists, it is clear that too many people cannot access dental services. That applies both to private and to NHS services in certain areas, including, for a time, one of the large towns in my constituency. Simple nostrums do not deliver the answers to complex problems. On that basis, we welcome the debate that the Parliament has had today.

There is nothing so glad to the heart as a sinner who repenteth. I welcome the additional resources and the setting of priorities. I need only look back to the "Draft Budget 2005-06", which is about a year old, to find that there is only one reference—in a very large document—to dental services, on page 56. None of the targets and objectives for the health service refers to dentistry and the proposals for the years up to 2008 show a flatlining budget for general dental services for four years in a row from 2004-05. The response by the Executive and the changes that it has made are most welcome, but they are comparatively recent. That illustrates the value of sustained parliamentary pressure from members of all parties—I include in that members of the Executive parties, some of whom have had a Damascene conversion.

When he opened the debate, the Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care said that the Executive's measures were good news for dentists and patients. I would prefer him to have said that they were good news for patients and dentists. Although the difference is subtle, the change of emphasis is not trivial. Let us not talk about dentists, except in so far as they meet patients' needs. My colleague Tricia Marwick made the fine point that we need a degree of clarity on what "patients" actually means; I am sure that the minister will be able to give us that clarity. Unless it means all the people in Scotland who wish to access NHS dentists, we will be

missing a trick. I hope that we will get reassurance on that.

The minister said that we must encourage dentists to rejoin the health service, but that might require a lot of courage on their part, given that there will be no substantial economic benefit to them as individuals. Dentists can make quite a lot of money in the private sector, although I would not seek to suggest that dentists in the NHS sector are impoverished. However, dentists who have gone to work in the private sector find that they can spend more time with their patients for similar money and feel that they provide a much higher quality of service. That is one of the fundamental difficulties that we face in recovering from the neglect of dental services that was started during the Tory years. I believe that dentists want to do a good job in delivering good oral health for the people of Scotland.

The minister said that we must have patience. That is certainly true in the sense that there is no quick fix that will deliver a solution overnight but, as Mao Tse-Tung said, a journey of 1,000 miles starts with a single step. We have made slightly more than a single step; we are on the case and we will continue to watch what gets delivered, as distinct from what gets done. The two are quite different—action is no substitute for achievement.

It is true that the dental health of our five-year-olds is the best ever, which is good, but NHS boards will continue not to move dentistry as high up the agenda as I and colleagues would wish it to be until there is a statutory duty on them to deliver NHS dental health services. I do not propose a date by which that duty should be imposed, because that would be for me to succumb to simplistic, knee-jerk reactions, but I think that we should say that we will have a statutory duty in the future, when the resources are in place and we have a plan that sustains that approach. That will give confidence to dentists and—more to the point—patients.

Richard Baker let down the tone of the debate when he attacked some dentists' conflict of interests. On conflict of interests, I need only refer to some of the member's Labour colleagues. Eight days after ceasing to be a Government minister, Baroness Symons became a director of British Airways. Alan Milburn, a former Secretary of State for Health, is now a consultant to Alliance Medical, which has big contracts with the NHS. The former UK energy minister, Brian Wilson, works for AMEC Nuclear and, within months of being Lord Chancellor, Derry Irvine was working as a consultant for Hutchison Whampoa, which wants £77 million from the Government. I ask Richard Baker to think again on conflict of interests.

We can discuss the past ad nauseam, but we cannot change it, so the SNP will make common

cause with the Executive to tackle Scotland's oral health deficit. We now need the Executive to make common cause with the dentists.

11:30

**The Minister for Health and Community Care (Mr Andy Kerr):** That was a good speech, which was ruined by a 30-second meander. Nevertheless, I welcome Stewart Stevenson's comments on dental services.

Like Lewis Macdonald, I believe that what we have outlined this morning is good news for patients and dentists. We listen to debates such as this morning's with great interest. I welcome the widespread support of members of all parties for the measures that we had already outlined and those that we announced today. For some reason, some people seem to assume that the Executive has not been working on dental issues since 1999, but that is not the case. The measures that we take will continue to make a substantial difference.

As I indicated to the Conservatives, we have had widespread support for our plan—all the consultants who work in dental public health, all the clinical directors of dentistry, the chairman of the Scottish Dental Practice Board and the Scottish Consumer Council are behind it. I am certain that the measures that we are taking will make the substantial difference that we want them to make.

I have been heartened by the support that members of all parties have expressed for our commitment to the NHS. As Lewis Macdonald explained, dentists who have a reasonable patient base and who treat both children and adults will benefit substantially from our recent announcements. We are not showing bad faith by explaining to the people of Scotland the efforts that we are making to ensure that NHS dentists will stick with their patients. It is only right for us to do that. That is what we have sought to do and it is what we will continue to do.

As the process unfolds, we want both to bring dentists back into the NHS and to keep those dentists who already work there. However, in common with many members, I cannot support the position of those dentists who say that children will be treated as NHS patients only if the parents sign up as private patients. Some dentists are asking parents to sign up to a private dental insurance plan before they will treat their children. In this day and age, it is not acceptable to use the prospect of NHS treatment for children as a carrot to ensure that the parents sign up for private dental treatment. I know that my colleague Lewis Macdonald will take up that ethical matter with the president of the General Dental Council.

I welcome and broadly support what Shona Robison said. In particular, I was heartened that

she felt that the package was broadly acceptable. On part-time dentists, as others have recognised, the figure that we have set under the new allowance scheme is fairly reasonable. The figure of £50,000 is an average for each dentist working in a practice, including full-time and part-time dentists. If a dentist feels that that is unreasonable or that all the criteria have not been met, there is an appeals mechanism that they can use.

**Stewart Stevenson:** It would be helpful if the minister could confirm that the £50,000 is prorated to the hours that are worked.

**Mr Kerr:** The figure is £50,000 per dentist. The member's point is about full-time equivalents, on which the position is clear.

We have been negotiating with the BDA for many months and we will continue that process. We want to work with the BDA and we will continue to do so.

We will be constructive in ensuring that Nanette Milne's point is addressed. Lewis Macdonald is involved in that process. She mentioned dental outreach and academic staff, of whom there is a shortage around the UK. We are working on that and we will seek to ensure that training of such specialists takes place.

Carolyn Leckie spoke about the situation in Lanarkshire. The resources that we are investing are targeted first at areas of deprivation. Our quality assurance process has picked up that some problems have occurred in Lanarkshire, which we are addressing. We will ensure that the resources that are deployed in Lanarkshire target areas of deprivation and those people who are most in need.

Elaine Murray referred to the situation in Dumfries and Galloway. I reassure her about the golden hellos: for example, there will be four golden hellos for independent dentists; depending on the work that we are doing with the board, five or six Polish dentists will go to Dumfries and Galloway, as she requested; and there will be six golden hellos for dentists undertaking vocational training. That is on top of all the measures that Dumfries and Galloway is taking to resolve those problems, as Elaine Murray outlined.

Euan Robson articulately raised many of the key issues that we face, such as the thresholds that we set and the role of part-time dentists. On the Polish dentists, there will be 12 in the first phase, 12 in the second phase and 15 in the third phase. They will be placed all around Scotland, to try to resolve some of the short-term difficulties that members so much want the Executive to address. That is right and appropriate.

On Roseanna Cunningham's point about funding for taking over existing practices, I confirm

that our revised access scheme will include funding to support dentists to take over existing practices and to help other practices to move to better premises.

Mike Rumbles correctly made a point regarding the dental school in Aberdeen. We will do what is in the partnership agreement. However, we also look forward to the opening of the Aberdeen outreach training centre in autumn 2006.

Jim Wallace mentioned the salaried service. We are working assiduously on that matter. The review has just been completed and the career structure for salaried services has already been developed. As Jim Wallace knows, boards have substantial capital available to invest in such facilities and £30 million of additional central funding is available for capital development, which will address some of those issues. There are many grants and allowances for salaried general dental practitioners, new and returning practitioners, remote practitioners, vocational trainers, out-of-hours services and other such measures. I assure Jim Wallace that we are listening to the professions and responding to their demands to ensure that we adequately support them.

**Shona Robison:** Will the minister take an intervention?

**Mr Kerr:** Sorry, but I need to make progress on other members' points.

Marilyn Livingstone rightly raised local issues and identified the good work that is being done in Fife in the triage service and in services in the community, particularly emergency services. Fife requested to be classified as a designated area. Since then, it has secured seven Polish dentists to assist it. We have written to Fife to ask whether it still feels that that is appropriate and we await its response.

I reassure Tricia Marwick that the Executive has been working on dentistry issues since 1999. The action plan is simply another step in the process of ensuring that we secure the access to services that patients want. My colleague will be writing to dentists to reassure them about our action plan. No press conference was held on the issue of a parliamentary question. The standard process was followed in response to a question. We pointed out that the figures were gross earnings and not to be interpreted in any other fashion.

I was not sure which Parliament I was in, never mind which debate, when Alex Fergusson made his comments. We have been discussing dental issues in PQs, at question time and in debates for many years. We are not bullying dentists; we are working with them. Government support for dentistry in Scotland is at historic levels. As a result of that continued support, dentists will come

with us. Rhona Brankin would be proud to be in the chamber today, having launched the action plan on 17 March. We have had an additional 50 dentists in Scotland in the past year and we are on target to have 200 extra dentists by 2008. Work is going on now that will achieve for patients.

In relation to the IDH contract that Alex Fergusson referred to, a proposal from Dumfries and Galloway on that is awaited. IDH provides NHS dental services in many parts of Scotland and England and it contains two dental corporations recognised by the General Dental Council. It represents another way of providing the services that everyone in Scotland wants. We have widened our intake of dental students. We are recruiting more widely and more effectively and we have doubled the number of applicants. Eighty per cent of this year's intake is Scottish; we would therefore expect them to stay in Scotland.

There are many other points to which I would like to refer, but time is not on my side. At the heart of the agenda are our proposals on the oral hygiene of children and on preventive care. That fits absolutely with our proposals in "Delivering for Health", to ensure that we prevent people from getting unwell. In this case, we want to prevent people from developing bad oral hygiene. The Executive is making a huge effort—in schools, for example, through its interventions regarding fruit and water. It is making a huge effort on oral health promoters and dental health support, on the work of the mobile units and on the focusing of resources on less well-off communities. Action is being taken now on public health measures for oral health—on the workforce and education, on the general practice allowance, on the rent rebate scheme and on emergency dental services. All those measures will work together to ensure that we improve our oral health, increase the dental workforce, improve education and training and modernise our system. It is for us all to do—it is for parents to do, it is for the NHS to do, it is for dentists to do and it is for the Parliament to support the motion.

## Question Time

### SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

#### General Questions

11:40

#### Bridge Tolls (Review)

**1. Tricia Marwick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Executive when the conclusions of the review of bridge tolls will be announced. (S2O-8101)

**The Minister for Transport and Telecommunications (Tavish Scott):** We are considering the findings of the tolled bridges review phase two and will announce our decisions on the outcomes in due course.

**Tricia Marwick:** While I do not wish to anticipate the results of the review, I advise the minister that there will be widespread anger in Fife if the only bridges that will continue to have tolls are on the Forth and the Tay, particularly when the capital cost of the Forth and Tay bridges was paid off many years ago.

**Tavish Scott:** As I am sure Tricia Marwick would expect, those matters are being considered as part of the review. We continue to analyse the responses. There has been considerable consultation with regard to those points, and we will make our announcements in due course.

**Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab):** I hope that the outcome of the bridge review will be the scrapping of the tolls on the Erskine bridge. Will the minister meet me and my local government colleagues regarding transport links along the north bank of the Clyde between Glasgow and the Erskine bridge, as I believe that a number of strategic projects need to be taken forward?

**Tavish Scott:** We had an interesting discussion the other day at the Transport and Local Government Committee about strategic, and indeed local, projects and how they should be taken forward in the context of the establishment of regional transport partnerships. I am keen for those partnerships to produce proposals and ideas for the road, rail and other public transport links that they regard as important in their areas. I would be happy to discuss those issues further.

#### Emergency Workers (Scotland) Act 2005

**2. Kate Maclean (Dundee West) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive what steps it is taking to monitor the Emergency Workers (Scotland) Act 2005 to ensure that emergency workers are

protected from assaults and harassment when carrying out their duties. (S2O-8123)

**The Minister for Justice (Cathy Jamieson):** We all depend on emergency workers for the vital services that they provide. I am sure that the Parliament will join me in condemning those who carry out such disgraceful attacks. The Emergency Workers (Scotland) Act 2005, which came into force in May, makes it clear that the Executive will take action to ensure that such behaviour is punished appropriately. The Lord Advocate confirmed on 3 November, in response to a parliamentary question from Marlyn Glen, that court proceedings have commenced on 92 charges under the act. The Executive will keep the operation of the act under review, which will include collecting and analysing appropriate data, with the aim of ensuring that the legislation is being used effectively.

**Kate Maclean:** Does the minister share my concern—and, I imagine, that of most members and the public—regarding the unbelievably lenient sentence that was handed out recently to the two men who carried out a serious attack on two paramedics? Is she aware of any plans to reconsider that sentence? Will she reassure me that the Scottish Executive is serious about wanting to stop attacks on firefighters, paramedics and the police, and that those who carry out those attacks will not be encouraged to think that their behaviour is acceptable by being given sentences that are, quite frankly, an insult to emergency workers in Scotland?

**Cathy Jamieson:** I make it very clear that I condemn absolutely, as others have done, any attack on an emergency worker as they perform their duties. As I said in my earlier answer, we depend, as do members of the public, on those workers for the vital services that they provide. Members will have heard me say previously that I cannot comment on the individual sentence that has been handed out. The judiciary has to consider all the facts before it. Because of concerns that have been raised, however, I have spoken to the Lord Advocate in relation to the case and I understand that he is awaiting a report on the matter. He will then decide whether any further action is merited. We will keep Parliament updated.

**Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con):** Does the Executive have any plans to introduce a high-profile advertising campaign that is aimed at stigmatising those who carry out attacks on emergency or public sector workers when they are acting in emergency circumstances?

**Cathy Jamieson:** Alongside the legislation, there is an awareness-raising advertising campaign to tell people about the measures that are being put in place and to show the wide range

of circumstances in which public sector workers sometimes face either verbal or physical attacks from the public. We will look at the effectiveness of that campaign and continue it in the future.

### **Legislation (Miscellaneous Provisions)**

**3. Trish Godman (West Renfrewshire) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive whether it has any plans to introduce a miscellaneous provisions bill that will enable any necessary modifications to be made to legislation already passed by the Parliament. (S2O-8116)

**The Minister for Parliamentary Business (Ms Margaret Curran):** The Executive has no plans to introduce such a bill.

**Trish Godman:** I am sure that the minister agrees that every Parliament in Europe is at some time faced with the need to amend or change laws that have been passed in good faith. In the welcome absence of a second chamber, does the minister accept that it makes sense to review and, if need be, to amend legislation that we have passed? How do we do that?

**Ms Curran:** I agree that at times it is appropriate to review and amend legislation and a variety of mechanisms are available to do that. We would never close our minds to other mechanisms should they be required. Sometimes the mechanisms are built into the legislation; sometimes they are part of the review of guidance procedures. A variety of other opportunities also present themselves.

If any further processes were required, the Executive would engage appropriately with them, most notably through the Parliament's Procedures Committee. I expect that discussions will be ongoing on those matters.

**Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP):** If the Executive were to consider the introduction of a miscellaneous provisions bill to amend legislation that has already been agreed by the Parliament, would it consider incorporating in such a bill the terms of my proposal to extend the boundaries of the Cairngorms national park to include the areas of Highland and eastern Perthshire that are in my constituency and which were excluded through mistakes that were made by Parliament in the legislation? In that way, an injustice that has been inflicted on my constituents could be righted.

**Ms Curran:** Nice try, Mr Swinney.

### **Battle Sites (Protection and Promotion)**

**4. Mr Andrew Arbuckle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD):** To ask the Scottish Executive what action is being taken to protect and promote the sites of historical Scottish battles. (S2O-8090)

**The Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport (Patricia Ferguson):** There is no statutory protection for battlefields in Scotland. However, Historic Scotland is actively developing a strategy for their identification and protection. It has recently commissioned the Battlefields Trust to create a gazetteer of key sites and will liaise closely with planning authorities on its development.

**Mr Arbuckle:** Is the minister aware that the proposed Denny to Beaulieu power line encroaches on the Sheriffmuir battle site? If that proposal is successful, it will neither protect nor promote that site.

**Patricia Ferguson:** When determining an application for consent under section 37 of the Electricity Act 1989, ministers are obliged to consider all material considerations, including the potential impact of development on historical sites. Historic Scotland is a statutory consultee in that process and will feed back its comments in due course.

**Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** The minister might be aware that I corresponded with her predecessor about the condition of the Ardoch Roman fort in Perthshire. That historic monument is being destroyed by the action of burrowing rabbits. I know that Historic Scotland tried to reach a deal with the local landowner to control the action of the rabbits, but can the minister give us an update of where matters stand in this serious situation? [*Interruption.*]

**Patricia Ferguson:** I realise that the matter is the cause of some hilarity to some members, but Mr Fraser raises an important point. The situation at Ardoch causes concern in the archaeological and historical communities. I am not sure whether the Roman fort is a battle site or how relevant it is to the original question, but the matter is being actively considered and I will write to Mr Fraser with an update on the latest progress.

### **Rosyth Ferry Port**

**5. Scott Barrie (Dunfermline West) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive what discussions it has had with freight transport operators, the wider business community and current and future ferry operators regarding the Rosyth ferry port. (S2O-8108)

**The Minister for Transport and Telecommunications (Tavish Scott):** The use of the Rosyth to Zeebrugge ferry service has been discussed on a number of occasions at meetings with the Scottish freight industry and other interested parties. I met representatives of Superfast Ferries on 10 November.

**Scott Barrie:** The minister is well aware of the disquiet that greeted last month's announcement



that the number of Superfast sailings from Rosyth to Zeebrugge would be halved. Does he agree that Rosyth offers an excellent link to northern continental Europe and that, from an environmental point of view if nothing else, we should encourage and develop links to and from the port? Moreover, does the minister agree that Rosyth—rather than Hull, as at present—is ideally situated to be Scotland's premier European port?

**Tavish Scott:** I very much accept Mr Barrie's points about the importance of Rosyth, its facilities and the ferry link. I hope that the company will be able to put the operation back on its previous footing; indeed, I discussed both that issue and the service's financial future when I met its representatives.

Recently I have met representatives of the Freight Haulage Association, and I am well aware of the association's views on the importance to the Scottish economy of Rosyth and the ferry connection. That reinforces Scott Barrie's important argument about Rosyth's pre-eminent position.

**Bruce Crawford (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP):** I thank Scott Barrie for asking the question. The matter is very important and I know that the minister is more than aware of the importance of the Superfast line to the port of Rosyth.

The minister will not have had a chance to read his copy of the *Dunfermline Press*, but it reports that Superfast Ferries is about to start a new connection between Great Yarmouth and Holland. Has the minister discussed that matter with Superfast representatives? Can he assure us that he will cement the company's presence at Rosyth and that he will do all he can to ensure that the Zeebrugge to Rosyth link is maintained?

**Tavish Scott:** I hope that Mr Crawford accepts that there is a difference between telling a commercial operator what it can do and being as constructive as possible, through agencies such as Scottish Enterprise and privately run organisations such as the Forth Ports Authority, to ensure that Rosyth is cost attractive and that Scotland has a viable enough economy and the sheer weight of freight to ensure that, in turn, the ferry service is viable and can return to its previous occupancy levels. We need to address some issues in that respect but, as I have said, I cannot tell the operator what to do. I can only strongly encourage and work with our agencies to ensure that we have the best possible service.

**Mr Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green):** In its first two years of operation, the Rosyth ferry generated around £150 million for the Scottish economy for only £1 million of Government investment. However, the air route development fund generates less than £50 million

for every £1 million that we put into it. Is it not time to prioritise the development of ferry routes from Rosyth and other Scottish ports and to rein in spending on air routes, which could ultimately undermine the competitiveness of future ferry services?

**Tavish Scott:** One important aspect of the Rosyth to Zeebrugge service was the growth in tourism that it encouraged in both directions. We want that growth to be not only maintained but enhanced.

Air services and ferry services have different markets. As someone who comes from an island, I certainly believe in the importance of ferry services and, in working on our forthcoming national transport strategy, I will do all that I can to consider the best way of further promoting links from mainland Scotland to continental Europe. I encourage the Greens to be part of that debate.

That said, I will not turn my face away from the importance of the route development fund, which brings important advantages to the Scottish economy. Indeed, the Scottish business community has told us for many years that having more direct, point-to-point links is important for business and the tourism industry.

**The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid):** Question 6 was not lodged.

### School Meals

**7. Frances Curran (West of Scotland) (SSP):** To ask the Scottish Executive whether it accepts that there is increasing evidence that free healthy school meals for all children would have a major impact on child obesity, child poverty and the educational attainment of all children and what its response is. (S2O-8093)

**The Deputy Minister for Education and Young People (Robert Brown):** There is increasing evidence that healthy school meals have a significant impact on child obesity and attainment. That is why the Executive is investing an additional £70 million to build on the achievements of the hungry for success initiative. However, the Executive does not accept that there is any convincing evidence that universal free school meals would be the most effective way of reducing child obesity or child poverty, or of improving educational attainment.

**Frances Curran:** Is it not the case that the train is moving off and the Scottish Executive has been left at the station? On board with the free school meals campaign are the Association of Head Teachers in Scotland, Children 1<sup>st</sup>, NCH Scotland, the Child Poverty Action Group, health boards, education authorities, nutritionists and parents associations—the list is too long to mention them all. Why does the Executive not accept that it is

just plain wrong on the issue and that now is the time to board the free school meals express?

**Robert Brown:** Far from being wrong, the Scottish Executive's approach has been approved by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education, which has identified the significant improvements that have been made, particularly in primary schools, as a result of investment to provide water and free fruit, and as a result of the local authorities' ability, with the funding that they have been given, to make advances on such things as breakfast provision and better dietary information. The important aim of that investment is to ensure increased and improved provision for all. I am surprised that Frances Curran should support a universalist approach, which has the incidental effect of putting more money behind the better-off people who can afford to pay for school meals.

**Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab):** Is the minister aware of recent research findings that estimate that poor dietary health in Britain costs the national health service £6 billion a year, which is four times the cost associated with smoking-related illness? Given the Executive's robust stance on smoking, does not the minister consider that simple economics dictate that we should take an equally vigorous stance on improving dietary health? Does he not therefore agree that the universal provision of nutritious free school meals would be a prudent investment in the future health and well-being of our nation?

**Robert Brown:** The Scottish Executive is making substantial, sustained and sustainable investment in improving the dietary habits of young people. People such as Elaine Smith make a mistake in the propositions that they put to the chamber, because there is a difference between providing the meal and creating a situation in which children actually eat their meals.

We are taking a broad approach, which will improve children's knowledge of their diets and produce sustainable improvement, because they will go home and talk to their parents about what they eat. At the end of the day, regardless of the provision of school meals, children will have to make choices out of school, at home and in their future lives, and we want them to be able to make those choices on the basis of much better information and with a considerably improved attitude to diet. That is the successful result of hungry for success and that is the line that the Executive intends to continue following.

### **Scottish Banknotes (Consultation)**

**8. Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive whether it has made any representations to HM Treasury, the Bank of England or the Financial Services Authority regarding the recent consultation on

Scottish banknotes, reflecting the concern of the financial services industry in Scotland over potential implications of proposals contained in the consultation paper. (S2O-8132)

**The Deputy First Minister and Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Nicol Stephen):** The Executive recognises the concerns of the banking industry in relation to the recent HM Treasury consultation on banknote issue arrangements in Scotland and Northern Ireland. I have written to Ivan Lewis MP, the Economic Secretary, welcoming the extension to the consultation and urging him to work with the industry in Scotland to ensure that all the issues that it has raised are fully explored before any legislative change is proposed.

**Des McNulty:** If some of the proposals were taken up and Scottish banks were no longer able to issue their own banknotes, has the Executive given consideration to what cost would be involved in changing the name of the Bank of England to the Bank of the United Kingdom, and would the Executive be expected to make a financial contribution?

**Nicol Stephen:** The intention of the Treasury consultation was not to discourage note issuing. Rather, the proposals were intended to protect note holders and to support a competitive financial services industry. Scottish banknotes have a long and proud heritage and have been issued for 300 years. We do not want to see them disappear. They should not disappear as a result of the consultation, so the other points that were raised by Mr McNulty should not and, I believe, will not arise.

**Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP):** In his submission to the Treasury, will the minister point out that the proposals could cost Scottish banks up to £80 million a year? Will he suggest to the Treasury and the Bank of England that, instead of trying to scrap Scottish notes, they should try to ensure that Scottish notes are made as acceptable as English notes, in England and throughout the world, at the proper exchange rate?

**Nicol Stephen:** The consultation, which has now closed, received 30 or so responses. That is why continuing discussions between the Treasury, Scottish Financial Enterprise and the Committee of Scottish Clearing Bankers are so important. There is an issue of the impact on and potential cost to the industry. However, there should be—and, I believe, there will be—no restriction on the Scottish banks' ability to issue notes. Scottish banknotes will continue to be very much part of the strength of the Scottish financial community.

## First Minister's Question Time

12:00

### Cabinet (Meetings)

**1. Nicola Sturgeon (Glasgow) (SNP):** To ask the First Minister what issues will be discussed at the next meeting of the Scottish Executive's Cabinet. (S2F-1920)

**The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell):** We will discuss all sorts of issues, all of which will be important to the people of Scotland.

**Nicola Sturgeon:** I am sure. According to the Panel on Takeovers and Mergers, the body that regulates company mergers and acquisitions, when talks are under way about a possible bid for one company by another,

"more information (in the public domain)"

is

"preferable to less information".

Does the First Minister agree?

**The First Minister:** It is important that information is in the public domain; however, it is also important that companies behave appropriately in those circumstances. Therefore, when information should be in the public domain, there is an obligation on the part of a company to make sure that that happens. However, I would also want to be clear that the interests of companies, particularly those headquartered in Scotland, were being protected as part of that process.

**Nicola Sturgeon:** I refer, of course, to a possible takeover of ScottishPower. Does the First Minister share my concern that, right now, ScottishPower is being negotiated away behind closed doors? The next we might hear is that a deal has been done to sell Scotland's biggest industrial company to E.ON.

I accept that the company has a duty to its shareholders, but will the First Minister accept that at stake are the national interest, the consumer interest and the employee interest? For those wider issues to be fully debated, there must be clarity from ScottishPower about its intentions. Will the First Minister join me today in asking the board of ScottishPower to break its silence and to make clear exactly what is going on?

**The First Minister:** Ms Sturgeon's interest in consumers is a welcome development as part of the debate. It would be helpful if we had some perspective. Discussions are being held at the moment, but there could be other indications of interest should ScottishPower decide that it wants to move in that direction or should E.ON decide

that it wants to make a bid. Ultimately, if such a proposal were made it would have to be investigated properly and thoroughly at United Kingdom or, more likely, European level.

There are still several stages in the process. Our job in this Parliament is to defend and promote successful Scottish companies that are headquartered in Scotland, and ScottishPower comes into that category. That is why it is wrong for anybody from any corner of the chamber to run down ScottishPower or to create unnecessary speculation about it. Our job is to promote the fact that ScottishPower is making the right decisions to ensure that it remains profitable and that it remains the successful Scotland-headquartered company that it is.

**Nicola Sturgeon:** We know that ScottishPower is in talks with E.ON. I asked the First Minister—but he did not answer—whether it would be in the national interest for ScottishPower to be up front about the state of talks.

Is the First Minister aware of the growing body of opinion in Scotland that ScottishPower should remain independent? Sir Iain Noble and Charlie Gordon—the local Labour MSP—think so. Even the European Commission said this week that merger control is needed to preserve competition in the energy market.

I ask the First Minister to answer unequivocally: does he agree that ScottishPower should remain an independent Scottish company, and does he accept that if he would only come off the fence, he could be very influential in making sure that it does?

**The First Minister:** We have heard this ridiculous position from Ms Sturgeon before. Of course, any responsible member in the chamber should believe—as I do—that it is far preferable for Scottish companies to remain independent and to be headquartered here in Scotland.

We also have to live in the real world. The last time Ms Sturgeon raised this matter in the chamber, she was described by a variety of economics experts as being an opportunist with poor economics and as having a position that "defies logic", that was "shameful ... opportunistic nonsense" and the

"worst kind of political expediency",

as well as being "dishonestly simplistic" and showing "knee-jerk nationalism". I could not have put it better myself.

Of course we want ScottishPower to remain independent and headquartered here in Scotland. Of course, should there be any changes, we want the maximum number of jobs and the most effective operation of what remains of ScottishPower to remain here in Scotland. Of

course we would want both the United Kingdom and the European Commission to investigate any proposed merger.

However, we cannot ignore the fact that we live in a global economy. When Scottish and Newcastle buys up Greek or Russian breweries and beer companies or other companies around the world, ensuring that they are part of a Scotland-headquartered company, or when the Royal Bank of Scotland buys up banks in America, ensuring that they are part of a Scotland-headquartered company, we do not expect the Americans, Greeks or Russians to tell us that they are putting up their barriers and that we cannot buy their companies. We must recognise that we need competitive companies here in Scotland that are competing on the world stage and winning in world markets. That is the best way to preserve and expand Scotland-headquartered companies. The sort of protectionism that Ms Sturgeon promotes is wrong, and it will not work. It would result in a rundown of the Scottish economy, with barriers being put up, and it would end up destroying Scottish jobs.

**Nicola Sturgeon:** I remind the First Minister that my position, which he so derides, is shared by his good friend, Charlie Gordon.

The First Minister tells us what he wants, but not what he is prepared to do to get it. Is he aware of what happened when, earlier this year, the United States House of Representatives expressed its opposition to a foreign takeover of an American energy company? The foreign company pulled out, citing the "unfavourable political environment". Why will he not accept that—albeit in limited circumstances—when the national interest is at stake, politicians have a duty to stand up and be counted, and that he is now failing in that duty?

**The First Minister:** The direct implication of what Ms Sturgeon has just said is that access to the part of the US energy market that ScottishPower is still involved in, even having sold PacifiCorp, would no longer be allowed, and that she would not want ScottishPower to have that stake in the US renewable energy market. That is a ridiculous position.

If we are going to grow Scottish companies and have successful Scottish companies competing on the world stage, generating profits and, therefore, tax returns in this country, as well as generating jobs here in Scotland and keeping the Scottish economy's international profile high, we need Scottish companies to be able to buy companies on the international market and to take a stake in other countries. If Ms Sturgeon thinks that every country should throw up its barriers and prevent that from happening, she must realise that Scottish companies would be affected and would ultimately fail. That sort of nationalistic, simplistic

nonsense will not do when it comes to a 21<sup>st</sup> century economy.

### **Prime Minister (Meetings)**

**2. Miss Annabel Goldie (West of Scotland) (Con):** To ask the First Minister when he will next meet the Prime Minister and what issues he intends to discuss. (S2F-1921)

**The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell):** I hope to meet the Prime Minister again soon.

**Miss Goldie:** The First Minister should arrange a meeting as soon as possible. Mr Blair is a veteran of quelling rebellions. Judging by yesterday's pantomime here, the First Minister is in need of some desperate advice.

I wish to raise with the First Minister the latest figures from the Department of Trade and Industry for the number of VAT-registered businesses in Scotland. Those figures are regarded as a useful barometer for the health of our economy. In contrast with a healthy net gain of 1,825 businesses eight years ago, there was a depressing net loss of 135 businesses last year. The business barometer is dropping. How does that fit with the First Minister's "smart, successful Scotland" soundbite?

**The First Minister:** The figures are one of a number of indicators of the business growth rate and of business start-ups in Scotland. What is important is that we have a proper strategy for increasing the business start-up rate in Scotland and for ensuring the future success of those businesses. That involves not only the widely acclaimed and successful reorganisation of the grant schemes and support that are available for business in Scotland, which have been admired and copied elsewhere, but the need to create a more risk-taking, confident culture among young Scots in particular.

I will be asked a question later about determined to succeed. Earlier this week, I attended the Young Enterprise Scotland annual conference. Several hundred youngsters from throughout Scotland are involved in enterprise projects in the classroom. Those projects, which did not exist five years ago, are encouraging them not only to know more about business but to have the right sort of attitude that will encourage them to start up businesses during their lives.

We have to change the culture of Scotland, rather than just change the numbers involved or the decisions on legislation in this Parliament. By changing the culture we will see more businesses being created. Some will go to the wall, but many will succeed and grow and become the global companies that we have just been discussing—or at least trying to discuss—with the Scottish nationalists.

**Miss Goldie:** I have heard much from the First Minister in this chamber that is depressing, but to say that some businesses will go to the wall when we are looking at the worst recorded net fall of VAT-registered businesses for eight years and not to show a greater degree of concern is truly astonishing.

I accept that the First Minister is not, for the moment, on the easiest terms with his Liberal Democrat coalition partners, but I presume that he is still talking to Mr Stephen, his deputy. Mr Stephen said at his United Kingdom Liberal Democrat conference that he wanted to go further than the recent decision to restore parity with England on business rates and

"to make Scotland even more competitive with rates lower than England."

I well understand Mr Stephen's sensitivity, because he is the Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning, and in his own back yard of Aberdeen there has been a net loss of 100 businesses registering for VAT in the most recent year.

Will the First Minister accept the concerns of his deputy that we need to do more to help our businesses? Will the First Minister pledge to cut the rate now to achieve parity with England, or is his coalition really in tatters?

**The First Minister:** I will say two things in response to that. Not only are we committed to achieving parity between the business rate in Scotland and business rates elsewhere but we are all committed to ensuring that Scotland has a competitive edge. I said in the chamber in early September that one of the areas that we would look at specifically was ensuring that companies in Scotland that are engaged in research and development have an advantage in the business rate system. We are continuing to pursue that idea.

On business start-ups and whether people should be taking risks, I have to say with all respect that I think that it is wrong for us to create a culture in which people should not be encouraged to start up a business in the first place because they might be condemned when their business idea does not succeed. We need to create a culture in which people are willing to start up businesses. Yes, some of those business ideas might not come to fruition and the business might go to the wall, but many of them will succeed. If we have the right culture in Scotland, we will see more businesses started, more businesses succeed and more businesses grow on the global stage. That is the kind of enterprise culture that I want to see in Scotland, that Nicol Stephen wants to see in Scotland and that this partnership Government wants to see in Scotland. The wrong

way to change that culture is for the Tories and others to condemn those who try and fail.

**Miss Goldie:** I am tempted to restrict my question to three words: is that it? That was a most extraordinary display of rhetoric from someone who clearly has never run a business in his life. The figures are there. Business success in Scotland is going down. Can the First Minister do something about that now, or has he absolutely no relationship with his Deputy First Minister?

**The First Minister:** When I was a teacher back in the 1980s, the kids whom I taught in Tullibody in Clackmannanshire would never in a million years have dreamed of starting a business. They would never have dreamed of having the opportunity even to have such an ambition. They would never have dreamed that if they did so, they might be supported by politicians and Government. We need to ensure that in this country, youngsters from whatever background and whatever community believe that starting a business is a legitimate aspiration for them. That is why we are not going to stick with the ideas of the past that come from the Tory party but will ensure that in Scotland today youngsters in every primary and secondary school believe that they can start businesses, can have that aspiration and can succeed. That is a can-do, confident culture that will result in more business start-ups, more businesses registered in Scotland and more success for the Scottish economy.

**The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid):** There are two important constituency questions.

**Pauline McNeill (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab):** The First Minister will be aware of the tragic circumstances of the case involving Farah Noor Adams, who was found murdered beside the River Kelvin. The police are now investigating why, when she dialled 999 five times on her mobile phone, British Telecom did not pass her call to the emergency services.

Will the First Minister assure me that the investigation will take into account the fact that many people who call 999 will not be able to speak to an operator because of the danger that they are in, most notably when violence against women and children is involved? Will he assure me that the investigation will recognise that many people rely on their mobile phones to help to keep them safe?

**The First Minister:** Commenting on the specifics of such cases is always difficult because of the need not to prejudice any investigation that is taking place. However, I will say that the existence of mobile phones and mobile phone operators in this country should make lives safer rather than put lives in more danger and that it

should be easier, rather than more difficult, for people to contact the emergency services.

I understand that the circumstances are being investigated at the highest levels in the phone company and—obviously—in the police, and we will ensure that ministers receive a report of that investigation. If we need to take any action, we will pursue it. However, I want to make it clear that the safety of the public must be paramount and that phone operators and phone companies in this country have an absolute duty and obligation to ensure that the 999 system operates successfully and that people's calls are quickly passed to the emergency services. If that does not happen, action will be required to resolve the problem.

**Margaret Smith (Edinburgh West) (LD):** In the light of yesterday's announcement about the loss of 260 jobs at BAE Systems Avionics, will Scottish Executive ministers, as a matter of urgency, meet the relevant parties and take all possible steps to try to safeguard those highly skilled jobs for Scotland?

**The First Minister:** Yes, of course. Discussions will take place with Scottish Enterprise Edinburgh and Lothians and the other agencies that help out in such situations. With Scotland's employment rate at its highest-ever level, I hope that there will be a good market that will ensure that people's skills are kept in Scotland and that people find alternative employment. However, it is important to stress that BAE Systems is making positive decisions elsewhere in Scotland and that it has been able not only to retain workers, but to expand the workforce in Glasgow, for example, as a result of other contracts that it has been awarded. The decision to which the member refers is deeply disappointing and local action will be required to alleviate the outcome, but it is important for us to ensure that BAE Systems and the work that it is currently involved in are welcome in Scotland.

### **Secretary of State for Scotland (Meetings)**

**3. Shiona Baird (North East Scotland) (Green):** To ask the First Minister when he will next meet the Secretary of State for Scotland and what issues he intends to discuss. (S2F-1934)

**The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell):** I expect to meet the Secretary of State for Scotland within the next week or so. We will discuss a number of issues that are important to the people of Scotland.

**Shiona Baird:** In September, the First Minister told us that a new protocol was needed to protect the welfare of children of asylum seekers. Last month, he told us that progress was being made and that he expected us to be patient. However, after each assurance there are more dawn raids, each of which seems to redefine brutality. Will he

condemn the latest reported example in which the Home Office carried out a dawn raid and deported a family to Pakistan, knowing that it was leaving behind—abandoning—a 16-year-old child? Is not that the most disgraceful neglect of responsibility for that child's welfare? If the child returns to Scotland, will the First Minister acknowledge that his welfare is still the Executive's responsibility?

**The First Minister:** I do not intend this point to be in any way facetious or to demean the importance of the particular incident, but I do not think that 16-year-olds are automatically covered by the legislation that protects children in Scotland in every case. Therefore, we would need to ensure that any interventions in such cases were appropriate.

Discussions continue with the Home Office on the agreement that we seek to reach with it. However, it is important for me to state yet again—as I have done on every occasion on which we have discussed this matter—that, if we have a system of immigration in this country, there will be people who will fail to meet the criteria and, therefore, will not be allowed to remain in the country. If people do not leave the country voluntarily, they will have to be forced to leave. That is a natural consequence of every immigration system in the world.

We are determined that cases that concern young children involve the education and social services that, in this country, have a responsibility for those youngsters. That is the agreement that we are seeking to reach with the Home Office. When we have made detailed progress on that, we will, of course, report to Parliament.

**Shiona Baird:** It becomes harder and harder for even the most patient of us to have any shred of faith in the First Minister's assurances. Surely he must accept that the practice of unannounced dawn raids must inevitably risk the repetition of this outrage, with more children lost, and that it is now time for something more than empty assurances. Will he give a firm and clear date for the new protocol? Will he agree that, come what may, the dawn raids must end, or will he take the only other option and admit that, however sincere his concern might be, he and his Executive are powerless to protect the welfare of these children?

**The First Minister:** Not at all. The appropriate services in Scotland and the appropriate authorities in Scotland already intervene when they need to in cases that involve asylum seekers and children in Scotland. They have done that consistently and with great integrity. They should not be insulted in the way that they have been. They carry out their jobs properly, we expect them to do so and they should be recognised for that.

At the same time, there needs to be an agreement with the Home Office. However, it would be far better for us to have the right agreement than to have an agreement that is reached in haste. That is why we will ensure that the discussions progress towards the right conclusion. I will not set some arbitrary date, as that might mean that the agreement could be inadequate. I want to ensure that the agreement is properly completed, and that is the point at which we will report to Parliament.

### Enterprise Education

**4. Cathie Craigie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab):** To ask the First Minister what progress is being made in achieving the original targets set by the determined to succeed working group. (S2F-1925)

**The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell):** Since we began implementing our enterprise in education strategy, the determined to succeed programme, we have funded dedicated DTS co-ordinators in every local authority, worked with partners such as Young Enterprise Scotland to get enterprise activities into every classroom, helped nearly 100 head teachers to attend a new leadership academy so that they can lead the enterprise effort within their schools and worked with the Hunter Foundation to develop XLERate, a ground-breaking programme to bring enterprise to vulnerable and disengaged young people.

**Cathie Craigie:** I am sure that the First Minister will be aware of the successful determined to succeed programme that is being run in the North Lanarkshire Council area. However, is he aware of the excellent work that is being done between schools and business in the Cumbernauld and Kilsyth area? Greenfaulds High School, pupils from which are present in the Parliament today, is one of the schools in which students, teachers and business benefit from the programme. However, as the targets were set three years ago, does he agree that it is time to review their success? In line with a question that was asked earlier today, I commend this worthwhile programme to the Scottish Executive for long-term funding.

**The First Minister:** I think that we should keep the programme under constant review, and we will report back to Parliament as the review process determines the next stages in the direction of the determined to succeed initiative.

I congratulate Greenfaulds High School on its initiative and also the many other schools across Scotland that are engaged in the programme. I believe that this is one of the most exciting things that has happened in Scottish schools for well over a generation. In our schools, enterprising teachers, head teachers, local businesses and local business figures, as mentors and advisers for

young people, come together with the young people themselves, who display a more confident and can-do approach than I have ever seen in my experience in Scottish schools. Those youngsters will drive forward Scotland in the years to come. The determined to succeed strategy is making a huge difference and I congratulate all those who are involved in it. Of course we will develop it as the years go by.

### Schools (Pupil Attainment)

**5. Iain Smith (North East Fife) (LD):** To ask the First Minister how the Scottish Executive intends to improve pupil attainment in schools across Scotland. (S2F-1933)

**The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell):** I am pleased to tell Mr Smith that pupil attainment has improved each and every year since devolution and that Scotland has one of the most successful education systems by international measurements. To build on that, we are investing in more teachers and classroom assistants. We are also investing substantially in teachers' professional skills. We are reducing class sizes and improving the fabric of our schools through our building and refurbishment programme. Through the provision of free nursery places, we are giving every child in Scotland a better start in life.

**Iain Smith:** Does the First Minister agree that publishing misleading league tables does nothing to improve pupil attainment? He obviously agrees that improved attainment will result from curriculum reform, investment in teachers to reduce class sizes and investment in new buildings and facilities.

Does the First Minister agree that parents want accurate and meaningful information about their children's education to enable them to make informed choices, and that such information will be delivered through the Liberal Democrat-Labour partnership Government's Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Bill? Does he agree that the education reforms of the Labour-only United Kingdom Government would be totally inappropriate in Scotland?

**The First Minister:** Opposition members hate it when policies succeed and achieve much for Scotland, when the partnership Government makes a huge difference and when Scotland gets better. I will tell Opposition members and those who seek to distort figures about our schools a few facts. Since the Tories left office in 1997, the attainment figures have risen by 7 per cent for primary 7 maths, by 10 per cent for primary 7 reading and by 14 per cent for primary 7 writing.

We have identified that secondary 1 and 2 are problem years in which we must tackle a tailing-off

in achievement by having more English and maths teachers, smaller classes and a review of the curriculum, but even in those years, the S2 reading figure has risen by 20 per cent since the Tories left office in 1997.

Those figures prove the progress in Scottish education. We will build on them. They are not yet good enough for Scotland, because our ambitions for Scotland have no limits or caps. We will ensure that the new teachers, the new curriculum, the investment in schools and in other staff and the support for pupils deliver even higher levels of attainment in the years to come.

**Mr Adam Ingram (South of Scotland) (SNP):** As a former maths teacher, will the First Minister reflect on the critical report on maths attainment in our schools by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education? It identified important or major weaknesses in 40 per cent of our schools. That is in the context of the findings of a recent survey of principal teachers of maths that the Scottish Mathematical Council conducted. That survey reported a slump in morale and pessimism among teachers about their subject's future because of a lack of national leadership and an absence of local support.

**The First Minister:** Lectures in pessimism from the Scottish National Party are somewhat difficult to take. Of course we take on board the views of HMIE and of principal teachers of mathematics. However, we also consider the stats, as I am sure teachers do, because they take pride in their work and they want us to recognise their achievements, rather than to run them down as the SNP and the Tories do.

I will describe the reality of mathematics results in Scotland. In 1999, 76 per cent of primary school pupils reached the desired level in mathematics. Today, the figure is 82 per cent. In S2—one of the years that have been a problem for youngsters in the past—41.7 per cent achieved the desired level in 1999, whereas 59.5 per cent achieve it today.

Of course that is not yet good enough for Scotland, but it is an awful lot better than it used to be. Devolution, the Scottish Parliament, the partnership Government and the teachers, head teachers, pupils and parents of Scotland are delivering. No amount of doom and gloom from SNP or Conservative members can run them down.

### Forth Bridges

**6. Tricia Marwick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP):** To ask the First Minister what the timescale is for the Scottish Executive to make a decision on the case for a new Forth road bridge, in light of the Forth Estuary Transport Authority's

appraisal of the condition of the existing bridge and its future use. (S2F-1922)

**The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell):** We are taking forward as a priority two strands of work. The first involves an independent technical assessment of FETA's current analysis of the cable issues, which is due in January 2006. That will be followed by consideration of the results of a planned cable replacement/augmentation feasibility study, which is due in 2007. The Executive will be able to make the necessary decisions informed by that analysis.

**Tricia Marwick:** Does the First Minister recognise or even acknowledge the strategic importance of the Forth road bridge for the whole of Scotland? Does he understand that, at the very least, the bridge is facing frequent closure for repair, that heavy goods vehicles are likely to be banned from it from 2013 and that the Executive needs to have a plan B in place? Will he therefore give an undertaking that the work on the case for a new Forth crossing will begin now?

**The First Minister:** It would be particularly stupid of us to start to carry out the work on a new Forth road bridge without having completed the analysis that will tell us what kind of facilities are required and what the exact nature of the current problem is. That is a particularly daft suggestion and we will not take it up. We will complete the studies by the appropriate authorities and then make the appropriate decisions.

12:31

*Meeting suspended until 14.15.*



14:15

*On resuming—*

## Question Time

### SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

#### Environment and Rural Development

##### Energy Crops Scheme

**1. Christine May (Central Fife) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive how many applications have been received for support under the new energy crops scheme. (S2O-8126)

**The Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Ross Finnie):** Under the common agricultural policy energy crops scheme, 147 applications were received for 2005.

**Christine May:** The increase in support in Scotland for energy crops has been widely welcomed, not least by Tullis Russell Papermakers Ltd and Scottish Biofuel Ltd because it will help to guarantee supplies for their biofuel power plant.

The minister will be aware of the 6 per cent reduction in the number of agricultural and rural jobs. Does he agree that production of energy crops will help to sustain and increase jobs in the rural economy? What dialogue is he having with people who represent rural interests and in the biopower industry to promote that very welcome scheme?

**Ross Finnie:** I thank Christine May for the question and, indeed, for her interest in the matter over some time. Energy crops are an extremely important tool in the development of our agricultural policy; indeed, non-food crops must play an increasing role in the policy. That is, of course, why the energy crops scheme was promoted as part of common agricultural policy reform and why we now have non-food set-aside. It is also why the Forestry Commission is providing grants for short-rotation coppice activity.

I am in the midst of revising elements of the agricultural strategy, a key part of which relates to energy crops. As a result, my department and I are engaging actively with a wide range of stakeholders and with the Scottish Agricultural Organisation Society, the National Farmers Union of Scotland and the Scottish Agricultural College. Stakeholders and others are coming together to try to actively promote development of a sector that has huge potential for preserving or increasing employment opportunity.

**Mr Andrew Arbuckle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD):** The minister will be aware of the project that has recently reported on the viability of biodiesel grown in the east of Scotland. Will he agree to help to facilitate a project team to help take forward the initiative?

**Ross Finnie:** I am certainly happy to discuss the detail of that matter with Mr Arbuckle. Of course, no matter whether the energy crop is rape seed or whatever, the difficult issue is where we process the crop. As the member will be aware, there are minimum levels at which such plants are economically viable. We have two jobs to do. First, I am happy to engage with the people who are involved in biodiesel and, secondly, we need to increase the level of production in Scotland. At the moment, we are falling a little short of being able to support a viably economic biodiesel plant.

##### Climate Change

**2. Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD):** To ask the Scottish Executive when the revised Scottish climate change programme will be completed. (S2O-8081)

**The Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Ross Finnie):** The review of the climate change programme is at an advanced stage. Critical to that, however, is the commitment that we have given to Parliament that we will include targets and measurements of carbon reduction. We await the delivery of crucial data from the United Kingdom Government. Its late arrival has caused some delay, so we now expect to publish our revised programme early in 2006.

**Jeremy Purvis:** Will the minister ensure that the final programme will be ambitious for the public sector in particular? The sector could take a lead not only in implementing national and local policies, but in energy efficiency and conservation. The programme should inspire future generations. The minister may not be aware of this, but Kirkhope Primary School in my constituency is the first school in the Borders to achieve green flag status. The pupils and staff who are watching the proceedings of Parliament this afternoon on the internet should be commended. They can also be inspired by the climate change programme, once it is completed.

**Ross Finnie:** Obviously, I am delighted that Kirkhope Primary School has achieved green flag status. Our eco-schools project has been taken up with great enthusiasm by schools across Scotland; increasingly, secondary schools are also becoming involved in that enormously successful project. That demonstrates that the young people of Scotland are grasping the imperative of putting the environment right up the programme.

In relation to our programme and the importance of the public sector, I am happy to confirm that the public sector has a role in driving measures forward. Given its purchasing power, the Executive has a big role to play. I will ensure that the final programme is delivered and published in a way that is easily accessible not just to the general public, but to our schools, and particularly to the pupils in Kirkhope Primary School who are watching this question time.

**Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP):** The minister will have heard Mr Ruskell and me on a number of occasions make the important point that we should ensure that the climate change programme includes plans for the public sector to devise heating systems so that major public sector projects, like the new Breadalbane Academy in my constituency, can be powered by wood fuel. Will the climate change programme be sufficiently flexible and comprehensive to ensure that such public sector projects get the go-ahead? Are ministers talking to each other to ensure that the rules are tweaked for that to happen?

**Ross Finnie:** The call is to tweak the rules. I am grateful to John Swinney for raising the issue again. The use of biomass heat projects is crucial, particularly given the accessible resource that we have throughout Scotland, and particularly in his constituency. Mark Ruskell has also raised the issue. I have taken up with ministers my concern that projects in which lifetime costs are considered ought to take account of more efficient and effective means of providing heat. I share that view with John Swinney, and I am in discussions about it. The policy framework will underline and reinforce John Swinney's point.

**Mark Ballard (Lothians) (Green):** I welcome the minister's support for targets and measurements, but is he aware of the severe criticism from WWF and Greenpeace of the record of Tony Blair's Government on tackling climate change, and in particular is he aware of the fears of those organisations that the UK Government might not meet the national overall targets for reducing greenhouse gases? Does the minister agree that that makes it even more urgent that Scotland set its own national overall target for greenhouse gas reduction, as recommended by the Parliament's Environment and Rural Development Committee and Scotland's leading environmental organisations, rather than simply use narrow sectoral targets and measurements?

**Ross Finnie:** On the first point, I am sure that Mark Ballard is perfectly capable of addressing the Prime Minister in another place on whether he will meet particular targets. I am absolutely committed to producing a climate change programme that sets clear targets for Scotland. Mark Ballard used the phrase "narrow sectoral targets", but given that

the methodologies that have been adopted in different sectors make it difficult to obtain a good database, it will be hugely important to Scotland to set targets across the sectors that make the largest and most significant contributions to CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, and that we are clear about what Scotland's contribution is. That is how the climate change programme will be demonstrated to be more credible than its predecessor.

### **Air Pollution (Towns and Villages)**

**3. Dr Jean Turner (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind):** To ask the Scottish Executive what action it is taking to address air and noise pollution in small towns and villages. (S2O-8096)

**The Deputy Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Rhona Brankin):** All local authorities are required by the Environment Act 1995 to regularly review and assess air quality in their areas, and to take follow-up action where the air is found not to meet the health-based objectives of the national air quality strategy. The Executive will soon implement the European Community environmental noise directive 2002, which in the first place will require mapping of all major agglomerations, roads, railways, airports and industry by July 2007.

**Dr Turner:** The minister will agree that for people who live where there is air and noise pollution, things have got worse over the past 25 years since the loss of railway lines and the deregulation of buses. They would agree that the quick way to sort things out is to have extra trains and buses going to and from cities, and extra parking at stations. Does the Scottish Executive have any plans for the near future to take heavy freight off narrow roads and instead to put it on to railways?

**Rhona Brankin:** I am not as pessimistic as Dr Turner. The long-term trends for pollutants are clearly downwards. Emissions are falling as a result of tighter industrial regulation and increasingly stringent emissions and fuel standards. However, we have a long way to go and we want to continue to improve, which is why we have set such stringent quality objectives. The Executive is investing more than ever in major transport projects, such as new rail lines, airport links and improvements to bus services. We now spend more than two thirds of our transport budget on buses, trains, ferries, cycling, walking and other forms of public transport. Of course we need to continue to work to get freight off our roads and on to trains or water. The Executive is continuing to consider the matter.

**Alasdair Morgan (South of Scotland) (SNP):** Pollution in small villages can be particularly bad when they are situated on trunk roads, as I can testify from living in Crocketford, where we are

frequently woken by convoys of lorries at 3 or 4 o'clock in the morning. Does the minister agree that road bypasses around such villages often contribute to a reduction in air and noise pollution? Does she disagree with members who would rule out building bypasses at any price?

**Rhona Brankin:** I understand that some smaller towns and villages are hot spots for problems with air quality; the village of Dalkeith in my constituency is such a hot spot. In some cases, bypasses can reduce pollution significantly and improve air quality, which should be considered when decisions are taken about whether to agree to build bypasses.

### Public Open Spaces

**4. Carolyn Leckie (Central Scotland) (SSP):** To ask the Scottish Executive what input its Environment and Rural Affairs Department has in respect of the selling of public open spaces by local authorities. (S2O-8095)

**The Deputy Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Rhona Brankin):** The department has no input. Disposal of local authority assets is a matter for the local authority. The Environment and Rural Affairs Department supports a range of actions to promote public open spaces, such as the greenspace for communities initiative, which is sponsored by Scottish Natural Heritage, and the woods in and around towns initiative, which is led by the Forestry Commission Scotland.

**Carolyn Leckie:** I remind the deputy minister that the partnership agreement states:

"We will review planning guidance to set strong minimum standards for including public open space in new developments."

I imagined that her department might have had something to do with that. Is the minister aware of the groundswell of protest about the prospective sell-off of green land at Colonsay field in East Kilbride, where I live and which I represent? That is set in the context of South Lanarkshire Council's being one of the worst culprits for selling off green space despite public opposition.

In many cases, the reason for sale of such land is public-private partnership schools projects, which have resulted in the equivalent of 180 full-size football parks being sold off throughout Scotland. Despite that, 29 of the 32 councils do not collate information on loss of green space, which means that there is no strategic overview of or protection for such space. Will the minister take responsibility for the Executive's commitments and make representations to other ministers to take action to protect green spaces by halting uninformed and non-strategic sell-offs until a wide-ranging strategic review of how to protect, improve

and—sometimes—to develop Scotland's green space takes place?

**Rhona Brankin:** A review of national planning policy guideline 11 is under way. Carolyn Leckie will be interested to hear that the review group, which met in October, comprises interests from planning, health, environment and rural development, local authorities, Communities Scotland, sportscotland, Greenspace Scotland and business. We hope to publish a consultation draft of the revised planning policy on open space next year.

The Executive is not sitting back and doing nothing. For example, we have provided additional funding for Greenspace Scotland for 2005-06 to help focus resources on communities that do not have access to green space. The project, which is concentrated on the 15 per cent most deprived data zones, will make a difference where it really matters. The Executive takes green space issues seriously.

### Firth of Forth (Oil Transfers)

**5. Marilyn Livingstone (Kirkcaldy) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive whether it will provide an update on discussions it has had with the United Kingdom Government regarding proposed ship-to-ship oil transfers in the Firth of Forth. (S2O-8122)

**The Deputy Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Rhona Brankin):** The Scottish Executive continues to maintain regular contact with the UK Government on the matter.

**Marilyn Livingstone:** Following the recent ruling on the habitats directive and given the need for further consultation, will the minister have discussions with the UK Government to ensure that any future consultation is inclusive and meaningful and will take on board the concerns of my local communities—indeed, of communities around the Firth of Forth? Can she assure us that issues such as the environment and the suitability and acceptability of location, as well as safety, will be taken on board and that the decision will be based on such considerations and not on financial profit?

**Rhona Brankin:** I am very much aware of the member's concern and of the concerns of other members on this issue. I am also aware of the European Court of Justice's ruling on the UK's transposition of the habitats directive. The Scottish Executive, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Department for Transport are considering the implications of the ECJ ruling. My officials are in touch with officials at DEFRA, and I spoke to Stephen Ladyman yesterday on the phone.

The Executive is fully committed to implementation of the habitats directive. The Executive's adviser, Scottish Natural Heritage, is advising an appropriate assessment of the proposal for ship-to-ship transfer in the Firth of Forth. I have agreed to meet the members who have a particular interest in the matter, and when I get further information from Scottish Natural Heritage and other ministers I will happily have that meeting.

**Susan Deacon (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab):** As the minister has said, a great many members—and, indeed, local authorities around the Forth estuary—have raised a range of concerns relating to the matter over many months. The issue was first raised with me and, in turn, with the minister in July. Is the minister therefore planning proactively to provide update material to the range of MSPs and local authorities that have asked questions repeatedly on the issue, in order to keep us fully informed of the developments that she has told us about today. Is it her intention to convene a meeting to bring us all together for discussion of this important issue that concerns us all?

**Rhona Brankin:** Yes—I will be more than happy to convene a meeting. However, I reiterate that I await advice from SNH following submission to it of more material on environmental implications. When I have that information, I will be more than happy to convene a meeting.

### Flood Prevention

**6. Euan Robson (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD):** To ask the Scottish Executive whether it considers that reservoir storage and upland flood plain developments should form part of local authority flood prevention strategies. (S2O-8082)

**The Deputy Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Rhona Brankin):** The Executive encourages local authorities to consider a broad range of options for flood alleviation, including reservoir storage and natural flood attenuation. Such measures will form part of our approach to sustainable flood management, on which we will consult widely in the new year.

**Euan Robson:** I thank the minister for taking the time to come to Hawick, in my constituency, to see the recent flood damage. The headwaters of the Teviot, which comes through Hawick, and the Liddel, which goes through Newcastleton, where there was also a flood, would merit upland storage and flood plain developments. Does the minister agree that some of the £89 million that is available from the Executive could be used if the local authority submits a plan that includes those measures? Does she also agree that it may be possible to use some of that £89 million to relocate

businesses from low-lying areas when there is no realistic alternative but to do so?

**Rhona Brankin:** I again extend my sympathies to the people who were affected by the flooding in Hawick. I was particularly affected by meeting some of the householders in Hawick when I visited. There are opportunities for reservoir storage and natural flood attenuation, and I hope that such measures will be in Scottish Borders Council's plan to deal with flooding issues.

I know that businesses were affected in Hawick, as was the rugby club. If the member is considering the possibility of finding additional support, it might be worth approaching sportsotland. When local authorities are drawing up their flood plans, they ought to take into consideration the possible impact on businesses and voluntary organisations such as sports clubs, as well as on the people who live in the area.

### Health and Community Care

**The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid):** We move to questions on health and community care. Question 1 is from Mr Frank McAveety.

Mr McAveety is not present. There is, of course, an obligation on members to be present when they have questions to ask.

### NHS Boards (Responsibilities)

**2. Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Executive what plans it has for the future responsibilities of existing national health service boards. (S2O-8076)

**The Minister for Health and Community Care (Mr Andy Kerr):** I expect NHS boards to continue to deliver improvements in the quality and accessibility of health care to everyone in their areas. We expect services to be delivered as locally as possible when that can be done safely and sustainably, but it is vital that patients have prompt access to specialised services when necessary. NHS boards are the key agents in delivering improvements through working with their patients and partners.

Many of our objectives for the NHS can be delivered only by boards working together. Regional planning groups are essential to ensure that effective action is planned and taken throughout the NHS. I believe that NHS boards are eager to make progress in the directions that we have set, and to build on the improvements that they have already delivered.

**Rob Gibson:** Is the minister aware of the string of insider allegations concerning the management of the Western Isles NHS Board? The *West Highland Free Press* in particular reports deficiencies in service delivery, qualified accounts

and alleged bullying of staff. Those allegations have been renewed since the minister's review of the NHS board in Stornoway last September. What steps does the minister intend to take, in the light of the evidence from the Institute of Healthcare Management, to resolve matters between the senior management and significant employees of the Western Isles NHS Board? Given the concern and conjecture, can the minister assure the people of the Western Isles that island-based control and management of health delivery remains secure?

**Mr Kerr:** I assure the patients and the communities that the member is talking about that I will deal swiftly with any such matters if there is a case to answer. During my review visit to Western Isles NHS Board, I made it absolutely clear in straightforward and robust terms that such nonsense had better stop and that the board should focus on patients' needs. To date, I have received no formal correspondence on the matters that Rob Gibson raises, but I will continue to review the matter closely. I made it clear during my visit what I expect to happen—that is what I expect to hear from the board.

There are many unsubstantiated aspects to the member's question and members of the NHS board have responded to many of the allegations.

### Poverty (Biological Consequences)

**3. Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green):** To ask the Scottish Executive what its response is to the view of the chief medical officer that poverty has biological consequences. (S2O-8144)

**The Minister for Health and Community Care (Mr Andy Kerr):** The link between poverty and ill health is well known. As I reported to Parliament last month, I intend to strengthen primary care services in deprived areas and to focus on early identification and treatment of ill health. In that way, we will tackle the biological effects of poverty more vigorously and at an early stage. The Executive also supports the Glasgow centre for population health, which has developed a research programme to throw more light on the biological consequences of poor socioeconomic status.

**Patrick Harvie:** I thank the minister and commend the Executive for supporting the work of the Glasgow centre for population health.

The minister will be aware of recent suggestions that living in extreme poverty for a prolonged time can damage DNA, which is an interesting and important area for further study. However, does the minister agree that representation of that idea in certain quarters of the press might be misleading and that we should avoid and

challenge any suggestion of a poverty gene because it is a distortion of science?

**Mr Kerr:** Absolutely, and I reassure Patrick Harvie that our chief medical officer, Harry Burns, is one of the most eminent persons with regard to that matter. He is working closely with me on those issues; indeed, his former employment was in Glasgow. I share the member's view of how those matters are dealt with publicly.

I reassure members that we have set targets to reduce rates of cancer mortality, smoking, smoking during pregnancy and other matters that most affect our less well-off communities. We are redirecting the national health service and refocusing its work. Through "Delivering for Health", which is our response to Professor Kerr's report, I believe that we will tackle the difficult problem that Patrick Harvie pointed out.

With colleagues who have other Executive portfolios such as environment and education, I will work with local authorities to ensure that we can begin to solve some of the problems. We need to tackle issues of lifestyle, confidence, education, transport, environment and access to open space. By working on all those issues, the Executive will tackle the issue about which Patrick Harvie is concerned.

**Mrs Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con):** Will the minister's health initiatives also tackle the deprived rural areas in the north-east and the deprived parts of prosperous urban areas such as Aberdeen city?

**Mr Kerr:** One of the greatest innovations of the Government in Scotland is provision of small-area statistics, which allow us to pinpoint more accurately where our challenges lie. Such figures allow us to tackle the issues such as those which Nanette Milne raises. We now have a better map of where Government interventions are required in Scotland, including the areas to which the member referred. I recognise the cross-party support that exists for "Delivering for Health", but if we can get that right, we will be able to ensure that anticipatory care and preventive action reach the communities about which Mrs Milne expressed concerns. That is exactly what the health strategy is about.

Our health strategy is shared across the Executive, as many other portfolios can also have an impact on matters of well-being, which are so important to communities.

### Childhood Leukaemia

**4. Chris Ballance (South of Scotland) (Green):** To ask the Scottish Executive whether it accepts that there is a link between childhood leukaemia and proximity to nuclear power stations

and, if so, what action it is taking to address this. (S2O-8143)

**The Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care (Lewis Macdonald):** We take expert advice on these issues from the Committee on Medical Aspects of Radiation in the Environment. The committee's 10<sup>th</sup> report, which was published in June, found no excesses of childhood cancer around 13 nuclear power stations across Great Britain.

**Chris Ballance:** Would the minister generally agree with the information commissioner that local statistics ought to be available to the public?

**Lewis Macdonald:** That is a curious question in the context of Mr Ballance's earlier question. If I understand him correctly, he is asking about access to information on leukaemia clusters. I recommend that he read the reports that have been made available. I can confirm that COMARE is currently looking at the wider picture of leukaemia clusters and cancer distribution in order to establish whether there is a wider pattern.

**Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con):** Does the minister agree that the most recent COMARE report is one of a number of such reports that have been made continually over the past 20 years? Does he further accept that, although local information was available 20 years ago on the incidence of childhood leukaemia around power stations, examination of the statistics revealed that the very low numbers involved meant that the statistics could be disproportionately affected by very small movements in population?

**Lewis Macdonald:** I have no reason to doubt the substance of what Mr Gallie has said about the position a number of years ago, although I cannot vouch for it directly. However, I can confirm that such clusters as have been found are not located primarily around nuclear power stations. Clusters have been found around one or two nuclear establishments such as Dounreay, which is a civic nuclear research site that is in the process of being decommissioned, but the number of people who are affected in those clusters is very low. It is by no means clear that a common link explains the causation of leukaemia in those locations. Part of the reason why COMARE is looking at the wider picture is to establish whether there is a pattern.

A number of possible explanations for the clusters have been advanced, including the explanation to which Mr Gallie referred and other explanations that focus on movements of population and so on. Clearly, it is important to establish whether there is a common cause and, if that is the case, to take action. Equally, it would be entirely wrong to act on suspicions or suggestions that were not backed up by evidence.

## Community Care and Health (Scotland) Act 2002

**5. Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Executive what concerns it has in relation to the implementation of the Community Care and Health (Scotland) Act 2002. (S2O-8073)

**The Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care (Lewis Macdonald):** The act contains a range of provisions that are at various stages of implementation. We will continue to monitor them to ensure that they are achieving what was expected when the act was passed.

**Mary Scanlon:** The act was the flagship piece of legislation in the first session of the Scottish Parliament. I remind the minister that schedule 1 to the act states that

"assisting with the preparation of food"

should not be charged for. Why can some councils choose to ignore a law that has been passed by the Parliament? Those councils include Dumfries and Galloway, where my colleague Alex Fergusson has many problems. [*Laughter.*] I mean problems with elderly people having to pay for the preparation of food. I am sure that he has other problems as well.

In a written answer to a question from me, the minister said:

"Only the courts can decide whether a particular local authority has acted in contravention of the law".—[*Official Report, Written Answers, 1 November 2005; S2W-19834.*]

He states that local authorities "should not charge" for assistance with the preparation of food, but he should have stated that they cannot charge. When the Parliament passes a law, that is surely the last word. I ask the minister to take action to stop pensioners having to take costly legal action to get their entitlement.

**Lewis Macdonald:** I saw comments on the matter attributed to Mary Scanlon in a newspaper the other day. My written answer to her question is accurate. It is not for ministers to interpret the law, nor should it be. It is for the courts to interpret the law. I do not think that Mary Scanlon should take issue with anything in my answer, because it clearly reflects the proper protection that is afforded by the division of powers between the executive and the judiciary.

However, I do not think that Mary Scanlon and I disagree on her point on the policy. The law was intended—and it was so written—to require assistance with the preparation of food to be delivered as part of free personal care. We made that clear to local authorities. A number of local authorities are not acting in line with that requirement and we are keen to ensure that they understand their legal obligation to do so. A

meeting is taking place as we speak between my officials and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. They are exploring why some local authorities have reached an erroneous conclusion on how the law should be applied and we will carry that work forward in the proper way.

**Shona Robison (Dundee East) (SNP):** What systems have been put in place to monitor the unmet need that occurs when local authorities assess people and determine that those people need free personal care but say that they are unable to provide that service due to resource constraints?

**Lewis Macdonald:** Again, we are exploring that with the local authorities. We have had indications that, in one or two cases, the kind of thing to which Shona Robison refers is indeed taking place. We want to ensure that no one who is entitled to free personal care is charged for a service that the law says ought to be provided free. The monitoring that we are undertaking involves both direct discussions with local authorities, as providers, and substantial research to establish what the position is.

#### **Children's Health Services (Edinburgh)**

**6. Sarah Boyack (Edinburgh Central) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive what support it is giving to the development of children's health services in Edinburgh. (S2O-8109)

**The Minister for Health and Community Care (Mr Andy Kerr):** Lothian NHS Board is developing its child health strategy, which we will consider when the board has completed a formal public consultation in 2006.

**Sarah Boyack:** Is the minister aware of the recent media speculation on the outcomes of the reviews of children's cancer services in Scotland and the future of the Royal hospital for sick children in Edinburgh? Will he reassure me and the Parliament that excellence in the provision of children's cancer services in Edinburgh and the Lothians will continue to be paramount? Will he also reassure us that his top priority is to ensure that children with cancer receive the best possible treatment and care?

**Mr Kerr:** I give the member that absolute assurance. I have corresponded on the point with elected members for the Lothians and I have written directly to the newspaper concerned. There are no proposals to close the cancer unit in Edinburgh. We hope that the greater services for communities that the member seeks will come about as a result of our proposals for a managed clinical network. Children's cancer is an extremely difficult area involving people who are specialised at what they do. The Executive simply wants

people to have access to the best possible care as close to them as we can deliver it.

There is no danger to the cancer unit in Edinburgh. With regard to the other substantive point that the member makes, I look forward to the development of a new children's hospital, which will be a further investment in the health care of the people of Lothian.

#### **Air Pollution (Deaths)**

**7. Mark Ballard (Lothians) (Green):** To ask the Scottish Executive what plans the national health service has to reduce the number of deaths attributable to air pollution. (S2O-8142)

**The Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care (Lewis Macdonald):** On 20 October, Rhona Brankin and I announced the Scottish Executive's commitment to develop a strategic framework for environment and health. That will cover a number of environmental areas that can impact on health, including air pollution. The framework will be a cross-cutting initiative and the national health service will be a key stakeholder in its implementation.

**Mark Ballard:** Does the minister recognise that, in that consultation, and in the views that have been expressed by the National Society for Clean Air, there is a strong emphasis on integrating air quality with all other actions and programmes? Given that public health is a priority for the Executive and that, in Scotland, around 2,000 deaths a year are estimated to be attributable to traffic pollution compared to around 900 that are attributable to tobacco smoke, will the Minister for Health and Community Care take a lead on the issue of improving air quality, as the Executive did on the issue of smoking, by ensuring that local authorities live up to their responsibility for improving air quality, for health as well as environmental reasons?

**Lewis Macdonald:** The purpose of the strategic framework that Rhona Brankin and I announced was to allow us to do that. We want to make early progress on that. In the first instance, we are focusing on asthma and cardiovascular disease, on both of which air pollution, among other things, has an impact. Therefore, we will want to identify what needs to be done and take action in order to deliver the necessary improvements.

#### **Free Personal Care (Implementation)**

**8. Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Executive whether it is satisfied with the implementation of free personal care for the elderly by local authorities. (S2O-8097)

**The Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care (Lewis Macdonald):** Local authorities are implementing a free personal care policy that delivers real benefits to frail elderly people across Scotland. We are currently examining the implementation of the policy in a detailed way. If we conclude that there are specific deficiencies in the implementation of the policy, we will work with our partners to put those right.

**Mr Swinney:** I welcome the minister's willingness to examine difficulties in the implementation of the policy. To follow the issues that were raised by Mary Scanlon earlier, can he confirm that the Scottish Executive has admitted causing confusion as a result of errors in its circular CCD4/2002, which persuaded some local authorities that they would be able to charge for the preparation of meals as part of free personal care for the elderly? If the minister confirms that to be the case, what does he think that it says about some local authorities that they were still charging for the preparation of those meals 12 months after the Executive corrected its first mistake?

**Lewis Macdonald:** I can confirm that erroneous guidance was issued and that that fact was drawn to the attention of councils in September last year, with the clear advice that they should correct any error in their implementation that might have followed from that.

We want to ensure that all local authorities are following the law in a consistent way. As I mentioned to Mary Scanlon, we are doing that in discussions with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and individual local authorities.

#### **Aberdeen Royal Infirmary (Ward Changes)**

**9. Richard Lochhead (North East Scotland) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Executive whether any investigations have been carried out into the impact on patient care and, specifically, cancer waiting time targets of the proposed ward changes, such as a loss of beds from general surgery, at Aberdeen royal infirmary. (S2O-8077)

**The Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care (Lewis Macdonald):** The proposed changes are part of work by NHS Grampian to redistribute beds between surgery and medicine to match bed usage. The board's view is that the changes will deliver an improved service for patients and will have no adverse effect on waiting times for cancer treatments or anything else.

**The Presiding Officer:** Still just within the bell, I call Mike Pringle to ask question 10.

**Richard Lochhead:** Do I not get to ask a supplementary?

**The Presiding Officer:** Yes. I am sorry, Mr Lochhead.

**Richard Lochhead:** Thank you, Presiding Officer.

The minister may well be giving the board's view, but I have met the general surgery consultants who work at the hospital, who are very concerned about the ward changes, which will have a knock-on impact throughout the hospital. They tell me—I am sure that the minister will take them seriously—that the impact on patient care and cancer waiting times may well be negative and that, if the changes proceed, they will be unable to deliver the service to the excellent level that they currently provide. Will the minister personally investigate those concerns?

**Lewis Macdonald:** Of course one always listens to clinicians' views, but one also looks to the health board to fulfil its responsibility to manage such matters properly. The occupancy rate for beds in medical wards is about 100 per cent, compared with about 70 per cent for beds in surgical wards. The board's view is that its duty is to find the best balance that ensures that surgery continues to be delivered and that the beds that are available for medical uses are put to those uses.

**The Presiding Officer:** Mike Pringle has graciously waived the opportunity that I offered him a few minutes ago, so we can move on to the next item of business. I will allow a slight pause for members who wish to leave the chamber to do so.



## Waste Strategy

**The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid):** The debate is on motion S2M-3585, in the name of Ross Finnie, on the waste strategy.

14:57

**The Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Ross Finnie):** The national waste plan was launched in February 2003. Its aim was to turn round decades of neglect and underfunding and to transform Scotland's waste record. It had specific and measurable targets to improve our recycling and composting rate and to divert waste from landfill. We backed the plan by providing major funding to local authorities through the strategic waste fund.

I will outline the progress that has been made since we launched the national plan. As always, I acknowledge that in making progress, there are always areas that we need to and are determined to develop further.

Our initial focus has been on improving recycling facilities, to make recycling easier for the public. To help to achieve that, we have allocated, to 2007-08, a total of £329 million to all 32 local authorities through the strategic waste fund. That has led to new kerbside recycling schemes and new and improved recycling centres and points throughout Scotland.

We monitor the impact of the resources that we provide. Today, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency is publishing the latest quarterly statistics on waste. They show that our rolling-year recycling and composting rate for the 12 months to June 2005 was about 19 per cent. The recycling and composting rate for the quarter from April to June was about 24 per cent, which compares with a rate of about 17 per cent for the same quarter in 2004.

Those achievements were made possible particularly by householders who participated in recycling schemes. I am glad to see co-operation between local householders, local authorities and us. Local authorities are saying a big thank you to householders and I add my thanks to people throughout Scotland for the way in which they are embracing the change that is needed to deal with waste.

Our target is to achieve a recycling and composting rate of 25 per cent by 2006. The latest figures suggest that we are on track to do that. However, we acknowledge that more needs to be done. Some authorities face particular challenges, such as remote, rural areas or large amounts of tenemental housing, for which it can be difficult to run kerbside collection schemes. We are therefore

running a pilot project on how best to promote recycling in tenemental properties, given the practical and logistical issues that can arise.

Our targets relate to recycling and to the diversion of biodegradable municipal waste from landfill. Under the landfill directive, Scotland will be able to landfill a maximum of 1.32 million tonnes of biodegradable municipal waste in 2010 and 880,000 tonnes in 2013, reducing to 620,000 tonnes in 2020. The current SEPA figures suggest that we are landfilling around 1.7 million tonnes a year, so we face a challenge. To help us to meet the targets, we have established the landfill allowances scheme to impose limits on the amounts of biodegradable waste that local authorities can landfill. That will help to ensure that local authorities know what they should be aiming at to help us to meet our EU obligations.

We have asked local authorities to work together and to provide strategic outline cases to the Executive by the end of January 2006 on proposals for more major waste treatment infrastructure to complement their current recycling efforts. Our aims are to maximise the levels of recycling and composting and to treat as much as possible of the remaining biodegradable residual waste, so that it no longer has to be disposed of in landfill. Once we have authorities' strategic outline cases, we can consider what funding to allocate to all local authorities through the strategic waste fund. I discussed the matter just the other day with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, which expressed concern that there were rumours to the effect that some of the central belt authorities might run away with all the available cash. That is not the case. We will treat cases on their merits and allocate funds across the whole of Scotland.

Having authorities work together will produce a number of advantages: sufficiently large contracts to attract interest from the waste management industry and to ensure competition in bidding for contracts; economies of scale; and sharing of expertise in areas such as procurement. It will ensure that we avoid unnecessary duplication.

Recycling is fine for diverting waste, but we must also ensure that we continue our efforts to encourage reuse. For example, through the investment in community recycling and social enterprise—INCREASE—fund, we have funded a number of community sector projects that refurbish white goods and furniture so that they can be reused, often by people on low incomes, but all at local level. We must continue our efforts to promote reuse.

I move on to waste prevention and reduction. We are funding the waste and resources action programme to work with retailers to cut waste from products and packaging. There is growing interest

in Scotland in WRAP's innovation fund, which aims to support projects that will reduce waste from products and packaging. WRAP will hold an event in Edinburgh at the end of January on best practice around the world on minimising packaging and on systems that reuse it. As part of its waste minimisation work, WRAP is also running initiatives to promote real nappies and home composting. More than 50,000 households in Scotland have now received home composting bins through WRAP.

To increase the focus on waste prevention and reduction, we, along with SEPA, have prepared a detailed consultation paper on domestic waste prevention. The consultation, which we will issue shortly, will look at the design and manufacture of products and the role of retailers, consumer behaviour, communities—including the community recycling sector—and local authorities.

**Mr Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green):** Will the strategy consider the introduction of statutory levies for items such as plastic bags?

**Ross Finnie:** We will not come to conclusions until after the consultation has taken place. The member will have to delay his question until we have consulted people on their views. On the basis of those views, we will reach conclusions. I am sure that the member will agree that that is the appropriate procedure, well established in the Parliament.

**Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):** Unusually.

**Ross Finnie:** Not at all—it has always been my style.

We want to tackle non-municipal and commercial waste. Our green jobs strategy states that resource efficiency and minimising waste are good for business and, much more important, good for the environment. Put bluntly, resource efficiency saves business money as well as helping the environment. We need to get that message across clearly.

We fund bodies such as Envirowise, which provides business with support and information to help it to minimise waste. We have issued a consultation on the sustainable management of waste from business and public sector organisations in Scotland. The consultation makes the point that the Scottish Executive will not spend significant resources on tackling waste from business. The polluter pays principle applies. Business waste producers must take responsibility for the cost of collecting and disposing of the waste that they produce.

As we said in our green jobs strategy, the move to much more sustainable waste management helps to create business opportunities. There are

opportunities in the collection and sorting of recyclate and in the processing of materials. There are many excellent examples of companies throughout Scotland using recyclate. Those examples range from the basic composting of garden waste and the crushing of recycled glass for use in water filtration or in construction through to the use of chipping wood for many purposes. A range of industries that make use of recyclate is now developing.

WRAP and Remade Scotland provide support to companies that process recyclate. Some of the support is financial. For example, last year, WRAP ran a Scottish capital grants scheme that provided £2.4 million of support to companies throughout Scotland.

We are making progress, both in providing new recycling facilities to help us to meet the 2006 targets and in planning for the future. However, I recognise, as I do in all these matters, that progress must continue and much more work needs to be done.

We look to make further progress in three main areas. First, we intend to extend and reinforce our progress on recycling both household and—perhaps more important—commercial waste. Secondly, we need to invest in the necessary infrastructure to deal with residual waste; I look forward to receiving authorities' strategic outline cases by the end of January. Thirdly, we need to increase the emphasis on the prevention and reduction of both household and commercial waste.

Although we have made progress, much needs to be done. The process involves getting engagement from our partners in domestic and commercial waste. We must win hearts and minds and convince people that we can make progress if we get ourselves focused in the right direction. It is not all at the hand of Government, although I understand and appreciate the role that we have to play. I believe that we have made a start and I commend to Parliament the Executive's motion.

I move,

That the Parliament welcomes the progress made in implementing the National Waste Plan; commends the response of the Scottish public to the efforts of local authorities, the community sector, the waste management industry and others which has led to major improvements in Scotland's recycling and composting rate for municipal waste; acknowledges the increased use of recycled material and the economic opportunities which this creates, and welcomes the Executive's consultation on the Sustainable Management of Waste from Business and Public Sector Organisations in Scotland and its forthcoming consultation on preventing household waste.

15:07

**Richard Lochhead (North East Scotland) (SNP):** Debates such as this one do not exactly pack out the parliamentary chamber, but they are extremely important nevertheless. After all, the debate is about how we manage the planet's valuable resources here in Scotland.

I was interested to read in the WWF Scotland submission that was sent to members prior to the debate that if everyone consumed at the rate that we in Scotland consume resources, we would need three planets to survive. The submission also states that waste in Scotland accounts for 38 per cent—well over a third—of our environmental footprint. That means that waste accounts for more than a third of the resources that we use. That is a ridiculously high figure. We must take into account not only the environmental cost but the financial cost of managing—or not managing—waste.

At the beginning of such debates, I like to remind members that now that we have our own Parliament, we get to speak about the environment and issues such as managing Scotland's waste, which is so important in that context. Such debates would never have taken place at Westminster, but during the six years of the Scottish Parliament we have had numerous debates on the environment. Those debates have taken environmental policy forward.

We should bear in mind the fact that this is a matter on which Europe has a positive impact on Scotland. Europe gets a bad name in this country for its unpopular policies on many issues, but environmental policy is one area in which pushing by Europe has led to progress in Scotland. Many of the pieces of legislation that ministers introduce here are a consequence of pressure from the EU.

However, we should not be complacent. I think that the minister's comments on the progress that is being made smacked slightly of complacency. Massive challenges face us in respect of dealing with our waste and, in particular, in respect of recycling, which tends to be the public's interface with the waste debate. Although we have made progress, we know that we lag behind many other countries on recycling.

Indeed, the Government's strategy might struggle to be successful because we know that it will be difficult to meet the 25 per cent recycling target next year. We all hope that we make it, but it will be difficult. We know that we produce more waste in Scotland than ever before. The most recent statistic that I have shows a 3 per cent increase in municipal waste in Scotland. At that rate, we will have to deal with another 1 million tonnes in eight years. According to SEPA, the average increase over the past 10 years was only

0.85 per cent a year, so the most recent figure of 3 per cent shows that we are producing more waste faster.

We have made substantial progress in recycling. Before the Parliament was established, only 4 per cent of waste was recycled, as the minister rightly said. Six years later, the recycling figure is 17 per cent, which is a substantial step forward. However, we must bear in mind the recycling rates in other small nations: 39 per cent in Sweden; 32 per cent in Denmark; and a massive 58 per cent in Austria. We must learn from those countries and we must consider examples such as that of Canberra in Australia, in which 75 per cent of household waste is recycled. By 2010, Canberra aims to have no household waste.

The figure of 17 per cent represents progress in Scotland, but if we are to achieve the 25 per cent recycling target next year, we must achieve the equivalent of the increase in recycling that we have achieved over the past four years in the next four months. That is a big challenge for the Government, but it is a particularly big challenge for our local councils, which are at the forefront of the work to meet the targets. However, there is a variable performance rate across the 32 councils in Scotland. Nine of the councils are less than halfway to achieving the target and in more than half of them the recycling rate is below the national average.

Some local authorities tell me that they hope to achieve the 25 per cent target but that, if they do so, they will be unable to achieve other targets and might face fines and penalties for that. They are up against it and we must give them support. We must identify why there is such variable performance among local authorities. Many say that it is because of a lack of resources and recycling infrastructure. The minister must respond to those concerns.

The big black hole in the Government's waste management policy is in the tackling of non-municipal waste. Eight million tonnes of waste go into landfill in Scotland and business in Scotland generates 75 per cent of that. The Government's target for recycling municipal waste—the 25 per cent figure to which the minister referred—will amount to only 6.25 per cent of all the waste that will be produced in Scotland by next year.

Getting recycling facilities into place so that we can maximise recycling is a major challenge. As the minister said, doing that can create green jobs. Currently, a local authority in the north of Scotland sends the waste paper that it collects from households to north Wales to be processed; that is turned into recycled paper that is brought back up to Scotland to be used again and to go through the same process again. Aberdeenshire Council, for instance, sends 330 tonnes of waste to north

Wales every month, which is 50 truck loads. In terms of our waste management strategy in Scotland, that practice wastes fuel and causes pollution. Surely doing that does not make sense. We must ensure that we have recycling facilities here.

We need help for the small business sector. I know that the minister is aware of the concerns of the Federation of Small Businesses, among others. The federation has cited examples of its members going to their local recycling facility in Aberdeen or wherever and finding that waste that is generated by small businesses is not accepted. The businesses must take their waste back to their workplaces and put it in with the general waste, which ends up in landfill. The recycling policy is failing in that regard. We look to the minister to introduce proposals to help small businesses to increase their recycling rates.

Of course, the crux of the matter is reducing waste in the first place. The biggest challenge facing the Parliament and the Government is to ensure that waste does not increase at a faster rate than we can recycle. We must look to public education to make everyone aware of the role of waste and, indeed, of the fact that they must redefine their whole approach to waste, because everything has a value and it is all precious resources. Public education is important. Indeed, in some local authorities, 20 per cent of people who have access to recycling bins from the local council do not use them, even when the bins are in their own driveways. We must move from being a throwaway society to being one that recognises the value of all our resources.

Finally, I want to talk about the Government's ability to implement an effective waste management strategy. The Parliament lacks the political powers to put in place an effective waste management strategy.

I was interested in the point raised about plastic bags. The Parliament is considering the Environmental Levy on Plastic Bags (Scotland) Bill, which is an attempt to cut down on litter and the waste of precious resources. How convoluted the process has become; it is in danger of turning into a dog's breakfast. Whether or not we support the bill, we have to admit that the process is convoluted and complex. It will lead to 32 local authorities having to collect their own separate levies, all because the national Parliament does not have the power to pass a simple piece of legislation to apply a national levy. The member whose bill it is, Mike Pringle, has to go through a convoluted process to get the levies in place. The Environment and Rural Development Committee is in danger of tying itself in knots trying to ascertain whether the Parliament even has the power to do that.

**Mr Alasdair Morrison (Western Isles) (Lab):** I remind the member that he is speaking on his own behalf; he is certainly not speaking on behalf of all members of the committee when he describes the committee as "tying itself in knots". He may be reflecting his own position; he is certainly not reflecting mine.

**Richard Lochhead:** I said that the committee was "in danger" of tying itself in knots. That is the Scottish National Party's opinion. Of course I was not speaking for the committee. That is patently obvious.

The minister has spoken about his consultation exercise on reducing waste. That will mean thinking about manufacturing processes, product standards and all the rest of it. Right at the beginning of the production process, we have to cut down on waste and save packaging. We have to consider better design.

All those issues require the Parliament to have powers to legislate. We need to tackle this issue and we need the powers to do so. I urge members to support the SNP's amendment.

I move amendment S2M-3585.1, to insert at end:

"notes that the key to a sustainable waste strategy is a greater emphasis on reducing the level of waste produced; recognises that to maintain public support and participation, waste collected for recycling should not go to landfill; notes that municipal waste accounts for only 25% of waste and that the other 75% comes from business and industry and accurate information on the amount of such waste recycled is required; notes concerns over the lack of accessible recycling infrastructure; calls for waste management support for the small business sector, and recognises that, for any waste strategy to be truly effective, Scottish ministers require the necessary political powers to ensure they have all options available to them, including measures relating to manufacturing, design and taxation."

15:16

**John Scott (Ayr) (Con):** I begin by apologising to the chamber on behalf of my colleague Alex Johnstone. He should be here, but he has developed a back injury and cannot be.

Speaking in this debate is a little like going back in time. Before the 2003 election, when I was my party's spokesman on the environment, I warned that the Executive was not moving quickly enough on recycling and that its recycling targets would not be met. Only 25 per cent of biodegradable waste would go to landfill by 2006 was the public assertion by Government ministers Finnie, Wilson and McNulty. We did not believe it then and we do not believe it now. I draw attention to that more in sorrow than in anger. We all sincerely hold the view that we should not be filling up our valuable landfill sites with biodegradable waste. I

appreciate the minister's acknowledgement today that we could all be doing better in that regard.

When looking at the figures two and a half years later, it gives me no satisfaction to find that we still send 1.8 million tonnes of waste to landfill every year, and to find that the figure is increasing instead of decreasing. It gives me no satisfaction to note in the 2003-04 figures that only 12.3 per cent of our biodegradable waste was recycled by local authorities. It is a matter of shame that our recycling figures increased by only 8.5 per cent between 1999 and 2004. One cannot see how the target of 25 per cent by 2006 will be met. To meet it, we would need to double our recycling in one year.

I regret to say that fly-tipping is still a huge issue in urban and rural areas. To me, the problem seems to be getting worse and not better. As levies rise on the legitimate disposal of industrial waste—which Richard Lochhead referred to—so too does the temptation to fly-tip. That well-documented practice has significant long-term implications for the environment.

Urban fly-tipping is on the increase in parts of my constituency. In some measure, that is driven by South Ayrshire Council's policy of emptying our bins only fortnightly. After a week or 10 days, my constituents' bins, on occasion, are literally full to overflowing. What are people to do with their household rubbish then? During the summer, I spent my annual leave in Spain. I was amazed that bins there are emptied every day. If Spain can do it, why can we not?

In the north Ayr communities, tenants and residents associations are constantly asking for skips to allow concerned residents to tidy up their areas. There is a continuing problem for which we have not yet found a solution. We must do so.

The first priority on recycling must be to get something done. Area waste plans are all very well, but everything is just taking too long. When the national waste strategy was launched in 1999, we were very far behind on recycling in a worldwide context. At that time, we should have found out what best practice was elsewhere in the world and unashamedly copied it. There is no copyright on ideas about dealing with waste, but six years later, we seem to be little further on. By the time the area waste plans are agreed and implemented, we will have lost another few years. By then, the plans might need to be updated to reflect the best practice that has emerged elsewhere, so I would like the minister to tell us how much flexibility is built into them.

Perhaps it is time for a little blue-skies thinking on waste disposal. I am thinking specifically of the direct variable charging schemes that are being introduced in the United States and Europe with

dramatic and positive effect. I understand that such schemes could work in Scotland by reducing the council tax by the average annual cost of collecting and disposing of waste—which is about £111 per household—and then levying a charge on the collection of waste on the basis of weight. In Europe, such charging schemes have reduced the amount of waste that is produced by as much as 30 per cent. Indeed, one scheme in the Landkreis Schweinfurt area of Germany resulted in a dramatic 40 per cent reduction in waste.

It might also be time to investigate advanced thermal treatment of waste, which is used to dispose of 78 per cent of waste in Japan. As the minister will know, ATT is not incineration. It is claimed that the process produces only water, carbon dioxide and heat, so it is certainly worthy of further serious evaluation. It appears that dioxins and polychlorinated biphenyls are no longer a problem in the ATT process. We could build local plants that could cope with between 30,000 and 90,000 tonnes of waste per year, which would produce usable quantities of base-load energy.

We must stop being so lethargic in how we deal with waste issues. The minister alone can inject a sense of urgency into addressing such matters more effectively; I know that he is capable of that. He cannot be comfortable about the imminence of missed targets. For the reasons that I have outlined, I urge the minister and the Parliament to support the Conservative amendment.

I move amendment S2M-3585.2, to leave out from first "welcomes" to end and insert:

"believes that the Scottish Executive's policy on waste is failing and that the amount of waste being sent to landfill is increasing, so that local authorities will have to double their recycling performance in one year to meet the 2006 targets, and further believes that after six years the Executive needs to take immediate steps to free up local authorities to enable them to deliver innovative and appropriate solutions to suit their local circumstances."

15:22

**Shiona Baird (North East Scotland) (Green):**

We warmly welcome the debate, which gives us the chance to discuss Scotland's waste policy. There is no doubt that things are moving in the right direction. The figures for 2004-05 reveal recycling rates of 17.5 per cent, which I was interested to hear the minister say have now risen to 19 per cent. The present rates are more than double those of three years ago. A few years ago, our record on recycling was pathetic; now it is just poor. A quick glance at the performance of our European neighbours shows how far we still have to go, and Richard Lochhead provided some figures on that. However, the situation has improved and we welcome the progress that has been made.

It is instructive to examine the waste returns for individual local authorities. During the second quarter of 2004-05, Clackmannanshire Council managed to recycle no less than 45 per cent of its municipal waste. Over the same period, Midlothian Council languished at the bottom of the recycling table with a barely credible recycling rate of 3.9 per cent. I simply do not believe that the people of Dalkeith and Loanhead are naturally less inclined to recycle than the residents of Alloa and Tillicoultry.

Sadly, not all the news coming out of Clackmannanshire is good. There are reports that the council is moving towards commingling, whereby products for recycling are mixed in with normal waste and are separated out only later. That may boost recycling rates, but it will devalue the final product. Councils must think hard before going down that route.

People will recycle if they are given the opportunity. Although some authorities are pulling out all the stops to enable people to do so, others almost seem to be standing in the way of their residents' desire to recycle. I ask the minister what steps the Executive is taking to chivvy along councils such as Midlothian that are not pulling their weight. In spite of its underperforming councils, Scotland is making reasonable progress, so imagine what we could achieve if every council had the imagination and ambition of Clackmannanshire and community recycling groups that were as good as those that operate in that part of Scotland. The target would certainly be in the bag.

As it stands, it remains to be seen whether the targets for 2006 can be reached. We sincerely hope that they can. Getting recycling up to 25 per cent might just be achievable; getting biodegradable waste down to 1.5 million tonnes a year probably will not be.

What is standing in the way of better progress on waste? We have already seen that individual councils have a key role to play. What about smaller businesses and community recycling groups? It seems that overzealous application of regulation risks hampering many of the small players. Fees of £3,000 a year for a waste management licence are a barrier; many small groups simply cannot afford that. Clackmannanshire owes much of its success to the actions of Alloa Community Enterprises. ACE and groups like it are vital if Scotland is to fulfil its recycling potential—we cannot afford to price them out of the market. It is just possible that regulations that were designed to divert waste out of landfill may be having the opposite effect. It may be that SEPA is constrained by the fee structure with which it is obliged to work. If that is the case, I urge the Scottish Executive to work with SEPA to

ensure that small groups are not priced out of the recycling market, while protecting SEPA's financial self-sufficiency.

Another reason why our progress is not as good as it could be is that our society is creating more and more waste in the first place. Although recycling rates are up, so is the overall mass of waste that is created. Between 2004 and 2005, waste arisings grew by 3.3 per cent—a higher rate than in the previous year. Even the rate of change of growth is in the wrong direction.

As long as our waste mountain continues to grow, policies that target only the downstream side of the equation can never offer a complete solution to Scotland's waste culture. As we all know, prevention is better than cure. Why wait until waste is generated before we act? We welcome initiatives on waste minimisation, which are a step in the right direction towards our policy of zero waste. We need to tackle waste at source, which means giving households, businesses and the public sector encouragement and advice on how to minimise the waste that their activities generate.

Ultimately, our target must be zero waste. During a debate on zero waste in the chamber about 18 months ago, members expressed a degree of scepticism that we could ever eliminate waste from our society. To them I say this: take a look around the world at countries, cities and communities that have achieved waste reductions that would put our best-performing councils to shame. Look at businesses that have dramatically reduced their waste output, in some cases by 98 per cent. In case anyone thinks that I am digressing too much by talking about zero waste, let me remind them that Scotland's national waste strategy describes zero waste as a key concept that is likely to shape future policy and action in Scotland. It is clear that Scotland has much catching up to do, and it is surely time that the Executive started using zero waste to shape current policy and action in Scotland.

I move amendment S2M-3585.3, to leave out from "implementing" to end and insert:

"improving Scottish recycling and composting rates but acknowledges that, in spite of these improvements, Scotland still lags behind many of our European partners and that the overall volume of waste being created continues to rise; notes that there is a wide variation in recycling rates across Scottish local authorities and strongly believes that access to comprehensive recycling facilities should not be a postcode lottery; commends the efforts of the public in rising to the challenge of recycling an increasing proportion of their waste in spite of often poor facilities and lack of clear information; expresses concern that many Scottish businesses and community groups engaged in recycling have found their efforts thwarted by inappropriate levels of regulation and heavy financial costs, and believes that a policy of zero waste, bringing environmental, economic and social benefits, is the only

truly sustainable way to tackle Scotland's throwaway culture."

15:28

**Sarah Boyack (Edinburgh Central) (Lab):** I apologise to the Presiding Officer and to colleagues for not being here for the entirety of the debate due to a long-standing meeting with a ministerial colleague.

First, I want to say where I think we have been coming from. I agree with much of the sentiment that colleagues around the chamber have expressed so far. We started off with one of the worst records in Europe and we are still one of the slowest countries in Europe to get our act together and recycle. However, without the European Union pushing us, with targets that are enforceable through daily fines, we would not even have got as far as we have. That has helped to concentrate the minds of the Executive and local authorities. The tranche of money from the strategic waste fund has been instrumental in enabling local authorities either to fund services themselves or to work with local community and voluntary groups to make a difference.

We have not gone far enough or fast enough, but we must celebrate the achievement of authorities that have managed to go from a recycling level of 6 per cent to a point at which they can think seriously of hitting their 25 per cent target next year. Their achievement goes against the grain of our casual, throwaway, consumer society; we should celebrate it.

I want not only to reflect on the progress to date, but to think about where we go next.

**John Scott:** Will the member give way?

**Sarah Boyack:** If I may, I will get going before I do so.

A huge amount of work has been done thus far. The combination of the strategic waste fund and the landfill tax, which I know nobody likes, has been critical in providing the resources to make people do things differently.

There is an economic cost to landfill. Landfill is part of our whole out-of-sight, out-of-mind attitude, except that people who have to live beside a landfill tip suffer as a result. Even well-run landfills result in thousands of lorry journeys every year, so nobody wants us to rely on landfill. However, the money that comes from the landfill tax has been used across Scotland to very innovative and great effect. In my city of Edinburgh, the Lothian and Edinburgh Environmental Partnership has done some brilliant campaigning work to engage people in the waste agenda through its waste awareness campaigns; composting trainers, who train up people on local community councils; and

tenemental experiments, to enable people who live in more densely populated areas to become involved. We still do not have on-street recycling throughout the city of Edinburgh for tenemental properties, which is an obvious thing that needs to be addressed. We are at the point of reflecting on how far we have come and thinking about where we go next.

When the Environment and Rural Development Committee considered the issue two years ago, we identified recycling markets and businesses as critical areas of influence, as is waste minimisation. Not every member has focused exclusively on recycling in the debate; a focus on recycling markets and waste minimisation should be part of the discussion today.

In considering the waste hierarchy, we need to think about how we can make recycling worth while and how we can create products that are marketable. For example, nowadays, the vast majority of our newspapers are produced from recycled paper. As a result of the drive towards remade products, we now have new products that did not exist a few years ago. We need to keep developing and expanding that kind of work.

I agree with colleagues' comments about the need to involve businesses in the waste agenda. We have domestic targets, but we need to get across to businesses the message that waste is a resource-usage problem; we need a culture shift.

We need to return to the waste hierarchy: reduce, reuse, recycle and recover. Recycling is down there at number three, so much more emphasis needs to be put on reducing the waste that we create in the first place and reusing the products that we have. Let us take product design as an example. We know that it is possible to produce products that are much more efficient not just because they use recycled materials but because those materials can be recovered after the product has finished its useful lifespan.

Packaging is a huge issue, which the Environment and Rural Development Committee has considered over the past few weeks in our debates on the poly bag levy. Those debates have highlighted the extremely wasteful practices of supermarkets across the country. Instead of encouraging us to use bags for life, whether they are made from plastic or cloth, shops are offering us multiple bags and excessive packaging. Raising awareness is a real issue in that regard. The Parliament should congratulate companies such as B&Q that have progressive policies and are taking the lead in a competitive market. It is disappointing to see that others have not focused on the issue.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh):** You have one minute

**Sarah Boyack:** Reuse is also hugely important. I am thinking of some of the furniture reuse projects in Edinburgh. It is appalling that people dump furniture just because they are bored with it. Furniture should be passed on for reuse to people who need it. Because of the Bike Station in Edinburgh, bicycles that would historically have been chucked in the bin are being reused.

Charity shops are a brilliant model of reuse. I went to a Barnardo's shop on the recent make a difference day. I was amazed to hear that Barnardo's bills have been slashed because its shops can now recycle stuff that they used to have to dump—indeed, they get paid for that recycling. We are talking about joined-up thinking.

Repairing goods should also be on the agenda. Most of us just chuck out goods. I cannot remember the number of stereos and compact disc players that I have owned. It is cheaper to buy a new one than to take the old one to be repaired. The economics of that are crazy.

My final point is about procurement, which is where the Executive can take a lead. Let us look at the procurement guidelines.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You must finish.

**Sarah Boyack:** I will wind up with two specific points. We must ensure that there is legal certainty to encourage people to buy products.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You really must close.

**Sarah Boyack:** We must also ensure that we fully implement the European Union's directive on environmental protection through our procurement guidelines.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You must finish now.

**Sarah Boyack:** I would be keen for the minister to get back to me in writing on that matter.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We are very short of time, so I insist that members speak for only six minutes.

15:35

**Roseanna Cunningham (Perth) (SNP):** I do not think that there is disagreement on the need to reduce the amount of waste that we produce and to improve considerably the way in which we deal with the remainder. Obviously, we need to waste less waste, but the problem is exacerbated in Perth and Kinross because of the substantial net inward migration that the area is experiencing, contrary to the national pattern—I suspect that Inverness is in the same category—which means that there are more people to produce waste. In effect, Perth and Kinross Council is having to run

to stand still—or not, because despite all the council's efforts, the waste produced in Perth and Kinross has increased by 25 per cent in the past 10 years, but then so has the population.

In Perth and Kinross, there are serious concerns about strategic waste funding. I will examine two related issues. The first is a delay in strategic waste funding from the Scottish Executive, which means that the waste processing facilities that are needed to allow the council to meet European landfill diversion targets are unlikely to be in place. The second is the worry that there might not be enough funding for all strategic waste projects, with some councils receiving funding and others having to shoulder the burden of waste infrastructure costs themselves. That uncertainty is compounded by the delays in determining strategic waste funding.

In his foreword to the 2003 national waste plan, the Minister for Environment and Rural Development stated that the Executive was

"investing heavily, allocating £230 million over the next three years through the Strategic Waste Fund to enable local authorities to recover wasted resources and put the Area Waste Plans into effect".

I asked my local council how that commitment matched up to its experience, and it told me that the minister's pledge was fair comment for the early funding that was received. Perth and Kinross raised landfill diversion from 20 per cent to around 35 per cent, largely because of the strategic waste funding that was received, but—and it is a big but—the problem is that it can go no further without funding for the major infrastructure projects that are required to compost, sort or derive energy from waste.

I am sure that Perth and Kinross Council is not unique in that regard. The fact is that local authorities know what they need to do, but the delay in receiving the appropriate funding is holding them back. Perth and Kinross Council submitted its bid for funding in April 2003. Funding was not determined until February 2004 and even then was only partially awarded—the Executive withheld an outstanding £17 million that was applied for. Apparently, there was to be a strategic review to ensure best value. An Executive official advised officers of Perth and Kinross Council that the process would be quick and that funding issues would be cleared up within a few months. Since then, the requirements of the review process have changed on several occasions, resulting in successive delays.

Finally, in June the Executive issued written guidance stating the format that bids should be in. It also indicated that it would not consider bids until January 2006, with the preliminary outcome of its assessment being made available by autumn/winter 2006. Those delays, uncertainties



and shifting goalposts are causing local authorities difficulties. For example, in Perth and Kinross, it means that once the time that is needed to procure and build large-scale waste infrastructure is added in, it could be 2012 or 2013 before plants are operational. The delays in providing funding will result in councils having to pay substantial landfill allowance fines of several million pounds a year, imposed by the very Scottish Executive that is the funder. That is worse than robbing Peter to pay Paul; it is holding back with one hand and taking away with the other.

There is more to the problem even than a delay in funding. I note the minister's comments about fears that the central belt will use up most of the money, but I understand that guidance issued in June stated that there might not be sufficient funding, and that three large central belt projects would be given funding priority. I hope that the Deputy Minister for Environment and Rural Development will clarify that in her closing comments. If it is true, it will mean everyone else being left to scrabble around for the scraps after the lion's share has been gobbled up.

I understand that £79 million of funding is available per annum. If the three large projects are given priority, that would not leave much for the rest, especially given that the rough estimate is that each of the premium projects will have £15 million to £25 million each year. Officials from Perth and Kinross Council have proposed a form of interim funding from strategic waste funding that could, for example, pay for the costs of transporting waste to be processed at a facility in another part of the country. I stress that that would be a temporary measure, until the permanent facilities that have been delayed can be built and brought on stream. The proposal received a positive reaction in principle but, again, timescales and uncertainty are making it almost impossible to get arrangements in place before April 2006. I urge the Minister for Environment and Rural Development to reconsider the proposal and to do all that he can to expedite matters.

15:40

**Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab):** Sarah Boyack and Richard Lochhead were right to highlight the role that the European Union has played through its directives on waste. The minister said at the outset that much work has been done, but he also made it clear that there is still much to be done. I support that view. From the Rhine to the Clyde and from the Danube to the Dornoch firth, we can see the impact on our landscape that the control of waste is having. It was rich for John Scott to say on behalf of the Tories that we are not making progress. I remember the years when little or no money came

to local authorities in Scotland to help with waste strategies. Fife Council had to stop its collection of waste paper as a consequence of that.

**John Scott:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Helen Eadie:** No. I am just getting started, although I may take an intervention in a moment.

In my constituency of Dunfermline East, we have a project that could play a major role in helping the Scottish Executive to achieve its targets. At the Westfield site, which is in close proximity to the M9 and a railhead, there is a proposal for a development where recycling will take place. I opposed vociferously the original suggestion for the site, which was to use it predominantly for landfill. I, and the community that I represent, had a major objection to that. The proposal has been altered—the current vision is to develop Westfield in Fife as Scotland's first sustainable recycling park. Planning permission for the innovative proposal has now been agreed, which provides an opportunity for Fife and Scotland to build a flagship development. I am aware of only one similar development in the United Kingdom, in Castleford, in England. As Scotland strives to develop as a green industry leader, the site will provide an integrated and comprehensive approach to help to meet multiple local and national objectives, including the delivery of viable and environmentally sound solutions for waste resource recovery.

Fife Council has gone from a record of poor achievement in recycling to the current situation, in which paper is recycled throughout the area and there are compost, glass and plastic bins and excellent kerbside sorting processes. One development is the involvement of local communities. Shiona Baird said that we must ensure that we involve communities. We have resources such as BRAG Enterprises, a social enterprise that develops small business and job opportunities. I hope that the minister will encourage such developments.

At Westfield, progressive restoration and enhancement of a despoiled landscape will take place, providing a range of biodiversity and public access benefits. Members should remember that British Coal removed 30 million cubic metres of soil and coal from the area, leaving behind the biggest hole in Europe, which is now filled with water. That was a blight on the area, so I am glad that the Scottish Executive now has an opportunity to work with me and my communities to tackle the issue. It will get business, local government and local communities working together to create an innovative site at the cutting edge of technology.

When we talk about how we dispose of waste, the key is how we use that waste. I hope that the

minister will take on board how we can convert waste into energy. At Westfield, we also have the Westfield energy plant. The gasification process that is used there is able to provide energy equivalent to 1GW, which is equal to the output of one nuclear power station. The combination of the gasification of sewage sludge—a big problem throughout Scotland, which has been emphasised strongly in petitions to the Public Petitions Committee—and taking on board the issues of coal and municipal waste—

**Mr Ruskell** *rose*—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The member is in her last minute.

**Helen Eadie:** I cannot give way. It is really important that I get this particular point over. I was going to give way but, in view of the time, I cannot.

The gasification process is critical. It will provide energy in the local community and it could embrace all of Scotland's sewage sludge; it could embrace municipal waste as well. Members who are opposed to the development of new nuclear energy will be pleased to know that the process could be replicated in other parts of Scotland, as it can be retrofitted on to existing energy plants. Here we have the possibility of our municipal waste not going to landfill, not having sewage sludge left on our land and using coal—an indigenous fuel, that I, as the representative of a coal-mining community, would want to see used. I hope that the minister will take that on board.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Again, I emphasise the fact that we are very tight for time.

15:47

**Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** One would think that an Executive that is good at recycling its own rubbish in the chamber would be well equipped to deal with the rubbish that is produced by the Scottish public. Regrettably, that is not the case. This country is lagging miles behind the rest of western Europe, where recycling is taken for granted and the population is encouraged to take some responsibility and play its part in keeping the country clean. In France, for instance, fly-tipping is discouraged by the fact that it is made easy for people to dispose of excess rubbish in déchetteries, the equivalent of our rubbish tips but much easier to access and to utilise. Those local recycling centres in small towns are looked after by qualified people who proudly surround them with beautiful gardens.

The Executive's record on waste is not good and is not going to be good enough to enable it to reach its target of recycling 25 per cent of waste by 2006. Some councils have done well and I

congratulate them. However, it is especially difficult for councils that manage remote rural areas to meet the targets that are thrust on them by the Executive, especially as we live in a throwaway society in which new buildings and new houses mean new furniture, leading to old furnishings and possessions constantly being thrown out in ever-increasing quantities.

The Executive's obsession with targets and action plans is not having the desired effect and the amount of waste that is being sent to landfill sites is still increasing. Many councils would have to double their previous performance in one year in order to meet the Executive's 2006 target. It is all very well for the Scottish Executive to dictate to councils what they must achieve, but it should be up to the Executive, as the Government of Scotland, to ensure that there are markets for recycled products.

"No targets without markets." That was what Highland Council told me in 2003. I remember saying that during a similar debate in our former chamber on the Mound. I am recycling that phrase now, because "No targets without markets" makes sense to me. As Sarah Boyack said, it is about joined-up thinking. I congratulate Moray Council, which hopes to achieve its 25 per cent recycling target. Western Isles Council, Highland Council and Argyll and Bute Council are working hard to reduce landfill and to increase the amount of recycling and composting. However, because of their huge geographical areas, their transport costs are much higher than those in the more urban areas.

Moray Council tells me that paper and cardboard go to Fife, aluminium cans to Alloa and steel cans to Glasgow. It has sold 429 composters and has given away a further 168. Green compost is shredded in Moray and transported to farms in Aberdeenshire. However, Moray's real bugbear is plastics. There seems to be nowhere in Scotland that deals with plastic recycling, so plastics have to be transported to England and then sent by boat to China and the far east. Most plastics therefore end up in landfill—

**Mike Pringle (Edinburgh South) (LD):** Will the member give way on that point?

**Mr McGrigor:** In a moment.

That is why the trees that surround rubbish tips in Scotland are often hideously adorned with plastic bags, in sharp contrast to the well-kept French recycling areas with their sweet-smelling rosebuds.

Councils are trying to develop a new culture of recycling, but they face barriers erected by the Executive in the shape of bureaucratic delays caused by the creation of the waste strategy area groups and the area waste plans. Those plans will

be far too rigid and they will not be in place until January 2006. As John Scott said, that means that, if the Executive takes a year to examine the plans, the plans will not be working until 2007. Why not let the individual councils use their own initiative and expertise to make the best decisions for their areas?

**Mike Pringle:** The member talks about individual councils doing their own thing. He also highlighted the fact that plastic bags are a serious issue. Does he think that the 32 local authorities would be capable of raising awareness in their individual areas?

**Mr McGrigor:** Our feeling is that there should not be a tax on plastic bags in this country. One reason is that it is very wet in this country and, if a paper bag is used, shopping can fall out of the bottom. The Executive should concentrate on creating markets that encourage the recycling of plastics and hazardous materials in Scotland.

I finish by commending the idea of advanced thermal treatment. As John Scott said, Japan uses ATT to dispose of 78 per cent of its annual waste. The technology has the potential to cut down on landfill and provide energy and new employment in Scotland.

15:52

**Ms Rosemary Byrne (South of Scotland) (SSP):** I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in the debate. We all produce waste and we must all do what we can to minimise it. The Executive motion mentions the efforts of the public and the local authorities to implement the national waste plan. Although I fully support and recognise the work done by the ordinary people of Scotland, I question in the strongest terms what some of our councils are doing and the support that the Executive offers to them.

Reduce, reuse and recycle must be our watchwords if we are to tackle the growing waste mountain that threatens us. However, whereas the battle for the hearts and minds of the people of Scotland on recycling seems to have been won, we are being badly let down by some of our councils. Figures compiled by SEPA just last week show that, far from increasing the amount of recycling facilities and capacity, councils are continuing to landfill waste. More worrying than that, they are landfilling waste that was meant for recycling. In 2003-04, more than 7,000 tonnes of waste that was collected for recycling was sent to landfill. It gets worse. In 2004-05, that figure shot up to 40,000 tonnes.

My local area is seeing the reality of such figures. The landfill site at Shewalton in Irvine is being extended and a new one is being opened up beside the old one. That is happening in spite of

objections from local residents and the environmental degradation that is being caused to the local community. While the size of the landfill site increases, there is silence from the council about new recycling facilities. The minister talked about rats. Rats are running around the housing estates surrounding the landfill site in Irvine, but no one is taking responsibility for that.

I have concerns about landfill sites all over the south of Scotland. Some of them are owned by councils but leased to private companies. What are the lease and financial arrangements for such privately run sites? What restrictions are in place to prevent those companies from transporting waste from other areas, which would make a mockery of the proximity principle? There is also an issue with the remediation of landfill sites when the sites become full. Whose responsibility will that be? Who will pay if the site is run by a private company? When private money comes in the front door, accountability flies out the window.

While all those issues need to be discussed, councils continue down the path of landfilling waste and continue to use private contractors, with the consequence that recycling takes second place. We can see the results in the SEPA figures. Householders are happy to sort their waste for recycling, but councils, rather than investing in proper recycling facilities, continue to waste money on private concerns that send waste to landfill. Where do councils get their lead but from the Executive? The lead comes from the Executive, which continues to push the private finance agenda.

Nothing is more important than the environment, as no spare earth is available for us if we muck up this one. However, instead of realising the importance of environmental issues such as waste, the Executive continues to focus its waste strategy on municipal waste and not on commercial waste. The Executive focuses on recycling but not on waste minimisation—although I was pleased to hear Ross Finnie's comments on that, so we hope and wait—and it leads councils down the garden path of privatising everything rather than acting in a publicly accountable way.

I recognise and applaud the work that ordinary folk up and down the country do in recycling waste. When I, too, worked in Barnardo's for a couple of hours on make a difference day a few weeks ago, I was impressed by the amount of recycling that I saw taking place. When bags of clothes are received that cannot be resold, the material is sold for recycling, which provides funds for the running of the shop. That is a brilliant idea, which could be extended. People are keen to recycle and they are keen to ensure that they do not throw out too much. We are educating and we are improving, but the improvement is down to the

fact that ordinary people are learning the lesson. We must follow the example that ordinary folk are now setting by caring for the environment. I wish that local councils and the Executive would show the same kind of responsibility as the public show.

15:57

**Maureen Macmillan (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** We last discussed the national waste plan in January 2004 in a debate on the Environment and Rural Development Committee's report on its inquiry into the issue. The then Deputy Minister for Environment and Rural Development said:

"We intend to increase our dependence on reuse and recycling".—[*Official Report*, 21 January 2004; c 4980.]

He also said that the Executive was committed to working with SEPA and local authorities to reduce our reliance on landfill.

Let me first give credit for what has been achieved so far. Although the amount of waste going to landfill has not been reduced, the most recent progress report on the Highland area waste plan shows a 27 per cent increase in the amount of waste going for recycling or composting. That is an improvement, although we start from a fairly low base. Recycling centres and civic amenity sites have appeared in our communities, as have some kerbside recycling schemes.

However, authorities that cover a huge rural area such as the one that Highland Council serves cannot possibly follow the model that works for more urban areas, as other members have pointed out. I am sure that the Minister for Environment and Rural Development and his deputy know what the challenges are. They will recall that the Executive rejected Highland Council's original proposals and cost estimates, but the council believes that the Executive's economic assessment ignores the geographic reality that kerbside collections are too expensive to operate away from towns. The council doubts that it will reach its 18 per cent recycling target by the end of March next year. It will thus fail to meet its targets under the landfill directive and its targets under the Highland waste plan, which demand 100 per cent kerbside recycling.

If the council fails to meet those targets, financial penalties will presumably be imposed. The council fears that the penalties could snowball to almost £5 million by 2010. That is of great concern, because such heavy fines will make it even less likely that the council will be able to comply with the Executive's targets. I ask the Executive to clarify whether it is indeed likely that penalties will be imposed. Perhaps the Executive can look again at the reality of the economics of supplying kerbside schemes in rural areas or agree to the same kind of flexibility as it showed when, several

months ago, it helped to solve the funding problems of not-for-profit reuse and recycling groups in Highland. The groups were caught between the different perceptions of the council and the Executive about who was responsible for their funding and governance.

I always use HomeAid Caithness in Thurso as my touchstone for whether things are going well in the recycling world. HomeAid receives donations of second-hand furniture, does that furniture up and passes it on to folks who need it—for example, women who come out of refuges and set up home anew, starting with nothing. HomeAid also has a shop, which sells surplus goods to the public—the knick-knacks and doodahs that come from house clearances and which are given by the people of Caithness. The profits from the shop support HomeAid's core services. HomeAid also offers people employment, including supported employment for vulnerable people. The good work that it does spreads out throughout the community.

The strategic waste fund supports HomeAid's work, but it could divert many more goods away from landfill if it was better able to access funding for infrastructure, such as another van or more warehouse space. HomeAid thinks that the INCREASE fund's decisions are not bold enough to support organisations. I have written to the Deputy Minister for Environment and Rural Development about that and I hope that she will give the matter her attention.

As other members have mentioned, a further problem in the north of Scotland is the distance from recycling markets. Low-value material cannot economically be hauled to the central belt for recycling, so, for example, Highland Council does not offer facilities for recycling plastic bottles and other plastic packaging. Such material makes up by far the greatest percentage of household rubbish, certainly in my household.

When I spoke in the debate on the Environment and Rural Development Committee's report, I asked why supermarkets whose vans trail up and down the A9 could not be required to accept the unwanted packaging and empty plastic bottles that they gave us in the first place. Mike Rumbles, who is not in the chamber this afternoon, confirmed from his personal knowledge that there are such return schemes in Germany. I recall that, in Germany, plastic bottles are made to be reused. Why does that not happen here?

**Eleanor Scott (Highlands and Islands) (Green):** Is the member aware that Campbeltown Wastewatchers in Kintyre recycles plastics? It offers a doorstep collection for plastic milk bottles and other plastic bottles, which it compresses. Those bottles have to go down south, but it seems

to me that, if some groups can offer that service, others could do so, too.

**Maureen Macmillan:** That company is in Argyll, so it is nearer to the markets than we are up in Highland. That makes a difference.

I know people in the Highlands who, because they regularly drive south on business trips, save up their plastic debris and pop it into an Edinburgh recycling skip when they are in the city, thus enhancing Edinburgh's recycling figures.

Where is the crossover between business waste and household waste? If we required suppliers to dispose of returned packaging, I am sure that we would soon have less packaging. Perhaps we should also make purchasers more aware of packaging excesses by requiring manufacturers to display the cost of the packaging on the box. Purchasers could then ask for the box to be removed and the money deducted. I know that some people make a point of ripping off excess packaging and leaving it in their supermarket trolley—I have done that myself on occasions. We certainly have to do something to minimise packaging and get the supermarkets, which are the biggest offenders, to engage with that. There has been a European regulation requiring us to do that since as far back as 1998. If we do not minimise waste, our landfill figures will continue to rise. In the north, the answer will be incineration, which I would support if it included positive energy recovery schemes.

I urge the Executive to address waste minimisation and to consider whether the waste plan is deliverable in rural areas.

16:04

**Mike Pringle (Edinburgh South) (LD):** I welcome the debate, coming as it does after my evidence to the Environment and Rural Development Committee on my Environmental Levy on Plastic Bags (Scotland) Bill. I was encouraged to hear the minister say in evidence to the committee that the Executive will soon consult on measures to reduce household waste and I was interested to hear what he said about that today. He was unable to give the committee a definite date for the consultation but, now that the committee is considering my bill at stage 1, it would be good to have a more detailed timescale.

Over the past two years, the national waste plan has focused closely on recycling and composting, with a target of 25 per cent by 2006. As we heard from the minister today, in April to June of this year, we had reached 24 per cent. Others in the chamber have doubts about whether we will reach 25 per cent next year, but I suggest that, if we were at 24 per cent in April to June, we should achieve 25 per cent quite easily. I further suggest

that that is because of the amount of money that the Executive has put into the work, which, as the minister said, is £329 million. However, some local authorities are clearly not doing as well as they should be. I would be interested to see the individual figures—if they are broken down like that—for the 32 councils from April to June.

We must ask ourselves what additional measures can be put in place to force the issue even higher up the agenda. Members will not be surprised to hear that I am of the opinion that we must place a real value on our waste so as to force a change in consumer behaviour. I do not in any way criticise the measures that local authorities are taking to encourage people to reduce, reuse, recycle and recover, but I believe that those practices will make it easier for those who want to recycle to do so; sadly, they will not force those who, for whatever reason, do not want to reuse or recycle to do so. That is because we still have a throwaway culture in which many people view waste as something that has no value.

The focus of the policy in my bill is on reusing and recycling, not waste minimisation. Across western Europe, recycling rates are considerably higher than they are in Scotland. In the Netherlands the rate is 59 per cent—or perhaps 60 per cent, as somebody else said. In Austria the rate is 58 per cent, in Germany it is 53 per cent and even in Ireland it is nearing 40 per cent, despite the fact that, three years ago, the Irish rate was lower than Scotland's. I do not believe that it is any coincidence that, in many of those countries, much of what we consider to be waste and which many people throw out now has a value. Countries such as France, Ireland, Norway, Germany and South Africa—the list is endless—charge for plastic bags and other items. That ultimately places a value on them and encourages people to choose alternatives that can be reused.

I was flabbergasted to hear Jamie McGrigor talking about people using a paper bag when they went shopping for goods in a supermarket. Nobody does that. The issue is not only about plastic bags, however, although they are a potent symbol of our throwaway culture. In Norway, many supermarkets now have machines that take in plastic bottles and give people money for them. I am told that they are constantly in use. If something has an obvious monetary value, people will not waste it. The Executive needs to think bigger. We need active waste reduction, perhaps moving towards zero waste.

The issue is not only municipal waste. I am glad that the SNP amendment mentions the fact that 75 per cent of waste comes from business and industry. They, too, must play their part. I would have been minded to vote for the SNP's

amendment if it were not for the final clause. I believe that ministers have the necessary powers; what is needed is for them to use those powers to the full.

I commend businesses that recycle a large amount of packaging and plastic waste. The small voluntary plastic bag schemes that they take part in feed into the solution. However, there is no connected strategy in place. Is it not about time that we had one? In that regard, I welcome the consultation exercise on the sustainable management of waste from business.

I have a major problem with the way in which supermarkets contribute to our household waste. This week, I was horrified to see individually plastic-wrapped vegetables in a supermarket. That is crazy and unnecessary. I hope that the Executive intends to tackle that sort of waste.

Supermarkets give out 700 million plastic bags a year. I was pleased to hear what Sarah Boyack said about B&Q. If the supermarkets in Scotland followed the best practice that is advocated by B&Q, Ikea and others, we would reduce the number of plastic bags used in Scotland by more than 80 per cent. We heard from Ireland that 90 per cent of the revenue from its plastic tax comes from only 10 per cent of the retailers who are registered for it. If the supermarkets in Scotland only followed that example, my bill would be completely unnecessary, to be frank.

The issue affects us all. There are not enough planets to allow us to continue to waste resources as we do. I support the Executive's motion, but I have much sympathy with the SNP and Green amendments.

16:10

**Alasdair Morgan (South of Scotland) (SNP):** We all sign up to the kind of waste strategy that the Executive talks about, but we should not ignore the fact that a reasonable number of firms try to use their processes and products sensibly. They seek to use as much of the material from their production processes as they can and they increasingly dispose of any balance sensibly.

As legislators, we must seek to ensure that the regulations that we impose or translate from European law to achieve our objectives do not have unintended, costly or unnecessary consequences for firms. That is why I am glad of the opportunity to speak briefly in the debate and to raise an issue that was brought to my attention—fortuitously—only this morning.

The case involves a substantial fish processing plant in Kirkcudbright that deals largely with king scallops and queen scallops. The problem relates to the larger king scallops. The method for dealing

with them results in a substantial amount of by-product of clean shells that do not go on to restaurants. There is no waste product and no guts attach to the shells, which are left after the scallops are packed and ready for the dinner tables of expensive French restaurants of the type with which I am sure the minister is only too familiar.

**Ross Finnie:** I am not about to share my tastes in restaurants, but I will help the member. The subject that he raises has been drawn to our attention. I hope that he will agree that it is sensible for us to enter into discussions with SEPA. We are not clear about why the relevant regulation has been implemented in that way. We will engage with SEPA and, if necessary, we will take action to amend the regulation.

**Alasdair Morgan:** I can recommend to the minister a good restaurant in Fécamp if he is ever across in France.

I will describe the problem for the record and to use up my remaining time. I do not know whether the minister has all the details. At present, Forest Enterprise uses 100 tonnes of clean shells a week to stabilise forest tracks and roads. The shells are particularly useful for that purpose, because they bind well with other material on the roads. They also have the benefit of greatly increasing the pH of the material on the roads. The minister will know that acidic run-off in forests is a problem, so the shells help with that.

After SEPA and the local environment department visited the firm this week, it was told that the clean shells that are being sensibly recycled would have to go to landfill within two days, because they were considered to be waste under the waste product regulation or whatever it is called. Doing that would cost the firm about £200,000 per annum. I know that the minister has given me an undertaking, but the issue must be considered seriously and quickly. The solution may be that the regulation is defective or that shells simply need to be recategorised as a different type of waste.

**Eleanor Scott:** Does the member agree that what is classified as waste is an issue? Topsoil is considered to be waste if it is removed from one site to another, but if it is put through a riddle, which just removes the chuckies, it becomes a product rather than waste. Common sense is sometimes lost in the definitions of waste.

**Alasdair Morgan:** I agree. A substantial issue arises at Longannet power station, where the definition of waste has caused us tremendous problems and has not improved what we do in the environment.

If the minister does not take the rapid action that he has promised, the danger is that we will enter

into a ridiculous situation that would fly in the face of what the Executive is trying to do. That is why I alerted the minister's officials to the problem this very morning. I am glad that communications in the Executive work so swiftly. I hope that the deliberation and decision-making process works equally quickly and successfully.

16:15

**Marlyn Glen (North East Scotland) (Lab):** It is useful for me to begin by recognising again how much the Scottish Executive is investing in managing Scotland's waste. An allocation of more than £111 million in the strategic waste fund for this year shows that the minister is sincere in his determination to bring Scotland's waste services into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. That determination should be welcomed.

Having local authorities and SEPA working in partnership has brought real progress. SEPA has delivered the policy and local authorities are playing their part in providing the services and ensuring that the investment delivers value for money. The management of municipal solid waste has improved enormously. However, as we have heard, there are still concerns about the allocation of money for strategic waste management facilities. I listened carefully to the minister's assurances on that point, but major infrastructure, such as in-vessel composters, materials recovery facilities and thermal treatment plants, needs time for planning, procurement and construction. If the allocation of money is distributed sooner, we could add an extra 5 or even 10 per cent to our national recycling figure. I urge the minister to look into the timing of the fund allocation. The success that we have seen is heartening, and it would be sad if future progress were to be unnecessarily inhibited.

Although there has been a giant step change in the management of domestic waste, I am concerned about the management of certain kinds of waste outside the remit of local authorities. The sewage disposal issue is still not resolved. It seems a waste of investment for pre-treated sewage not to be used as a fuel—after all, it is extremely renewable. We could and should turn the challenge resulting from the tightening of regulations into an opportunity.

Research has been completed at Cracow University of Technology that shows that, if pre-treated sewage is burned for fuel, the resulting bottom ash can be successfully used as a commercially viable source of phosphates. The Polish academics are willing to share their knowledge in order to move forward this clever piece of resource management. Such innovation not only provides a good waste disposal option but increases our sustainability. The essence of good

waste management is to create value from what would otherwise be regarded as waste.

As a few members have said, the creation of markets for renewable goods is crucial. The strategy is a cross-cutting initiative, and all Government departments must be involved in it at all levels. I urge both the Executive and Scottish Enterprise to place a greater emphasis on the initiative. We should be more up front about energy from waste—in all its forms, including incineration. Until the time comes when no energy is claimed by burning fossil fuels, it does not seem sensible to ignore the calorific value of waste. After all, domestic waste is often made up of renewable vegetable matter. In the Netherlands and other European countries, waste material such as waste wood that has been processed for fuel is classified as recycled. Energy from waste is regarded as a backstop for most of the European waste management regimes. SEPA's survey shows that the public prefer the option of generating energy from waste to that of putting waste in landfill. It is heartening that plans for that option are being pursued by many of the waste strategy areas.

It is also heartening to see the kind of forward thinking that looks to involve the planning system. That is necessary if we are ever to persuade individuals to segregate the recyclates in their homes, so that separate collections work properly. I commend the introduction of the new recycling bins for plastic that have been in use in this building since last week. Each one of us needs to take a stance on recycling at home as well as at work. I appreciate the initiative that has been introduced here.

The national waste strategy has provided a rigorous structure for Scotland, with clear definitions of the waste hierarchy and a realistic set of goals. That kind of integrated thinking has long been awaited.

**Eleanor Scott:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Marlyn Glen:** I am just about to finish.

The partnership working that is taking place augurs well for the future. We are still at the beginning of what can be seen as a long journey, but in my opinion we have made an excellent start.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman):** I can give Eleanor Scott three minutes.

16:20

**Eleanor Scott (Highlands and Islands) (Green):** Thank you, Presiding Officer—I will be brief.

I will talk about the barriers that exist to meeting some of our targets; I have tried to raise the issue in interventions.

Some of the targets can become perverse incentives. In the Highland region, because composting is an easy target for councils to meet, the council is now collecting garden waste where it did not do so previously. The target has resulted not in a reduction in the council's waste to landfill, but in more waste arisings. The Executive must consider closely the effects of the targets.

On commercial waste, I mentioned in an intervention that sometimes a definition works in perverse ways. I know of a quarry operator who extracts virgin rock and crushes it for aggregate—that is fine. He also crushes demolition waste and sells the resulting product, but he has to have a waste management licence at considerable cost—again, that is fine. However, he also has to have the crusher specially licensed to crush the waste material and has to pay for monthly inspections by SEPA. We are talking about bricks, rocks and the like from demolition sites. The result is that the recycled aggregate is not any less expensive than the virgin aggregate on which aggregate tax is paid. There is again a perverse incentive as the regulations militate against recycling.

Another example is that of a small garage on one of the islands that, for heat, burns in a very small burner waste oil that is extracted from cars. It can follow that practice, which seems perfectly sensible, because it has a derogation from the regulations on burning waste oil. However, from the end of the year, the firm understands that it will either have to stop the practice or pay the same licence fee—rumoured to be about £50,000—that a big oil-burning power station would have to pay. If the garage has to stop burning oil—and it will have to do so—its waste oil will have to be sent off the island to be dealt with and the firm will have to import oil to burn in order to heat the premises. That is another perverse incentive that militates against a little bit of local, sensible reuse of what would otherwise be a waste product that would have to be dealt with at some expense and at a cost to the environment.

The minister referred to community groups with a great deal of warmth and appreciation. Community groups have a lot of energy, drive and inventiveness, which, unfortunately, they tend to have to use to secure year-on-year funding, because funding is not secure. The groups provide benefits that cannot be measured by the price per tonnage. They provide employment; in some places they make products, such as the flaked newspaper animal bedding that is produced in Golspie. That is a much better approach than bundling the newspaper and sending it to China for reprocessing, which is what happens to a lot of

our recycled paper. Such community groups need much more support that they can rely on from year to year. They require core funding rather than challenge funding that they have to spend a lot of time bidding for each year.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We now move to the wind-up speeches.

16:23

**Mr Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife (Green)):** The debate has been interesting. We have heard about a number of visions. The minister's vision is mostly focused on recycling, but it is good to hear that he is now increasingly focused on waste minimisation. John Scott of the Tories gave us the blue-skies vision, which seems to be where he wants to put the waste—up there in the sky. Sarah Boyack gave us the waste hierarchy vision, which is only one shade of green away from Shiona Baird's vision of zero waste, which is where we all need to end up at. We must answer the difficult question: how much waste is acceptable in our society?

The minister is taking his first steps towards that zero waste approach and vision by consulting on the waste minimisation strategy. It was nice timing that the minister launched the consultation on the strategy just before he came to the Environment and Rural Development Committee to discuss Mr Pringle's member's bill. That shows some real movement from the Executive. I hope that once the minister has examined all the responses to the consultation he will consider statutory levies. There are advantages in what Mr Pringle is trying to do. It is a good idea to create a level playing field for businesses—especially the big supermarkets—so that they can all move on a plastic bag tax, for example, without fear of creating competition with one another. Responsible business is now calling for a levelling up of environmental regulations.

I wish that the minister had moved a bit sooner on the waste minimisation strategy. The Greens have been calling for it for a long time and the Environment and Rural Development Committee called for it two years ago. The minister would have had a much better story to tell today if he had moved several years ago on waste minimisation. If we adopt the strategy and get progress on it, there will be a phenomenal reduction in the amount of waste that goes to landfill. We will be tackling waste from both sides: we will be recycling and reducing at the same time, whereas, as Richard Lochhead said, at present we are just running to stand still. If the minister adopts in full a zero waste policy, he will not be alone in doing so, because New Zealand has adopted the concept and the Labour mayor of Doncaster is mad keen



on zero waste. We should all be working together on such issues.

Richard Lochhead and Sarah Boyack talked about the important issue of business waste and about how we can reduce the amount of such waste. Last night, when I looked at the Environment and Rural Development Committee's waste inquiry report, I got a sense of *déjà vu*, because it had a recommendation that was similar to one from the report on the committee's recent inquiry into climate change. There is a need to help business with waste—particularly small-to-medium sized enterprises, which do not have the cash to pay for environmental managers. The experience of the business environmental partnership in Midlothian is important in that regard. We need to mainstream support for all businesses in Scotland. Businesses have a vital role to play in achieving energy efficiency, which was discussed in the climate change report, and waste minimisation, which was discussed in the waste inquiry. Their efforts could save them hard money.

On the public sector, we now have important and useful league tables—though I hate to use that phrase—that show how local authorities are performing. For example, Clackmannanshire is doing extremely well, with a 45 per cent recycling rate during one quarter last year, whereas Midlothian is doing extremely badly, with only a 4 per cent recycling rate. We must ask why some local authorities are doing well while others are doing badly, because we do not want a postcode lottery for recycling in Scotland. One of the keys to Clackmannanshire's success is the strong partnership that it formed with Alloa Community Enterprises Ltd, a long-standing community recycling organisation.

Helen Eadie talked about community groups that are based at BRAG Enterprises Ltd in Fife. I remind her, of course, that Recycle Fife came out of the campaign to stop the Westfield landfill proposal. Maureen Macmillan talked about the important social element of sustainability in relation to many groups. The work that they do on supported employment provides real added value. It is extremely important that we do not lose the value of waste in relation to what it can do to create employment and to tackle some of our social issues.

We must have a culture of recycling. Sarah Boyack made that point when she talked about the importance of the strategic waste fund and the landfill tax in funding initiatives that can create a culture of recycling. Roseanna Cunningham talked about the importance of the strategic waste fund in pushing Perth and Kinross Council's proposals. However, I warn members against going for big infrastructure solutions such as incinerators or

gasifiers that will lock us into solutions for decades ahead. Those solutions are at the bottom of the waste hierarchy, not at the top, which is where we should be. They are at odds with the vision that Sarah Boyack laid out and with Shiona Baird's vision of zero waste. Energy recovery is the last thing that we should do. We should be working at the top of the hierarchy.

We heard about some perverse incentives from Eleanor Scott and Alasdair Morgan. Shiona Baird pointed to issues of smart regulation, such as the need to ensure that small community groups that cannot afford licensing fees are not funding SEPA, and that large enterprises are doing so. The exciting visions presented during the debate move us towards zero waste.

16:29

**Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD):** This has been an interesting and well-informed debate, and there has been a lot of agreement around the chamber.

I want to start by commenting on the amendments to the motion. The nationalists' amendment started off very well. Yes, we must reduce waste; yes, recyclable materials should be recycled; and yes, we have to be aware that domestic waste is only one quarter of the whole. However, when I reached the final three lines of the amendment, I thought, "Don't think so small." Business generates three quarters of all waste, as the nationalists point out, so, to create a level playing field, measures must be applied widely, across Europe at least, to avoid actual or perceived competitive disadvantage.

**Richard Lochhead:** Does the member accept that—as Sarah Boyack said—many powers that need to be used to reduce the waste produced by businesses are reserved to Westminster? The SNP is saying that Westminster, with full control over our waste strategy, kept us far behind other countries. If we had all the necessary powers, we could catch up with other countries.

**Nora Radcliffe:** I think that the member makes a fair point, but I was going on to say—as Sarah Boyack again pointed out—that the main driver for change, complete with very effective sticks, has come from Europe. I do not really care who does it as long as somebody does it.

In the Conservative amendment, the call to free up local authorities was a bit strange. The national waste strategy and the national waste plan were constructed from the bottom up, starting with local authorities. The strategic waste fund is awarded to local authorities for projects that the authorities themselves initiate. Local authorities have a lot of autonomy; they have been given freedoms.

I am sorry to say that the Green amendment was terribly depressing. I like glasses that are half full and not half empty. Nobody can deny that there is a long way to go. However, a lot of progress has been made. Often the initial movement is the hardest; once we are in motion, it is easier to accelerate.

I want to pick out two phrases in the Green amendment. The first one is "postcode lottery". That is a phrase I hate: I do not aspire to bland uniformity. Local autonomy, allowing local people to develop in the directions that suit their particular circumstances, is likely to lead to better outcomes and a variety of models of innovation and good practice that other areas can pick up on.

**Shiona Baird:** We were trying to point out that, although there is a 25 per cent target across Scotland, what we really need is a 25 per cent target for each local authority. As I said, some local authorities are very good and some are very bad. Having a single target for recycling across Scotland will not achieve as much as we ought to achieve.

**Nora Radcliffe:** I disagree. Maureen Macmillan suggested that we need different horses for different courses. We have to encourage people to do as much as they can in the way that suits them best. The overall result will then be greater.

The second phrase is "zero waste". The concept is useful in that it raises aspirations, but I have a couple of reservations about it. First, the unconverted might regard zero waste as undeliverable and might just give up and not make any effort to attain it at all. Secondly, I wonder whether zero waste is attainable only through semantics—in other words, by calling any final irreducible residue something other than waste. Having said that, semantics can be a useful tool. If we could persuade businesses and the public to describe materials that they now call "waste" as "a secondary resource", they would deal with those materials very differently.

I will turn now to some of the contributions to the debate. John Scott had some good ideas, but a daily bin uplift in Spain is probably more to do with hot weather than anything else. I would also worry about what are called "waste miles".

Shiona Baird usefully raised the issue of small community groups. I agree that it is important to acknowledge the contribution that such groups can make and to be aware of the difficulties that they can face.

Sarah Boyack made a useful and forward-looking speech. She spoke about closing the recycling loop and about getting businesses to consider not only their internal behaviour but design, in terms of product reparability, recyclability and packaging. Clearing houses could

also be provided to encourage the reuse of items that their owners no longer want.

Roseanna Cunningham illustrated the size of the task that lies ahead of local authorities in Scotland. They are starting from a low base and every area is trying to move forward at the same time. Marlyn Glen underlined that point.

As well as focusing on how much more could be done if even more funding support were provided, Maureen Macmillan considered how much more could be done at no, or minimal, extra cost through more effective use of resources. Alasdair Morgan illustrated how easy it is for any regulation or piece of legislation to have unintended consequences. The minister said that he acknowledged the problem and that there was a willingness to tackle it. We hope that that willingness will extend to dealing with sewage, which a number of members mentioned, and the issues that Eleanor Scott raised about targets and perverse incentives.

I must conclude, so I will jettison half of my speech—or rather, I will recycle it. Members should note that it is written on recycled paper. Reduce, reuse, recycle, recover—we need to lift the focus up that hierarchy. Government can set policies, provide infrastructure and offer incentives and disincentives, but at the end of the day progress can be delivered only when individuals get the message and change their behaviour. I commend the Executive's motion.

16:36

**Mr Ted Brocklebank (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** One thing is clear from this afternoon's important debate: Scotland's record on handling waste still lags behind that of many other countries. Sarah Boyack was right to state that the Executive has not gone far enough or fast enough and, to be fair, the minister conceded that in his opening remarks. We are certainly not short on targets and we do not seem to be short on ideas or, as the minister outlined, on funding. What seems to be missing, despite the Executive's best efforts, is a strategy to translate aspirations into action.

Mark Ruskell and others rightly emphasised the importance of recycling but, as many speakers pointed out, the Executive's recycling targets seem to be as far away as ever. Only 12.3 per cent of the waste that was collected by councils was recycled in 2003-04. That was an increase of only 2.7 per cent on the previous year. As we have heard, the Executive's target is to recycle 25 per cent of waste by 2006. Members such as Jamie McGrigor and Richard Lochhead pointed out that, to come anywhere near meeting that target, many

councils would have to double their recycling rates in one year. That is simply not going to happen.

The vaunted area waste plans are another case in point. The Executive has grouped councils together and charged them all with developing and sticking to an area waste plan but, as Roseanna Cunningham and others highlighted, in practice that seems only to have created bureaucratic delays for councils. I hear what Nora Radcliffe says and recognise that she believes in the glass being half full rather than half empty, but councils need to be empowered to make more innovative and flexible decisions that will be more sustainable in the long term.

**Ross Finnie:** Is the member saying that area waste plans, which were intended to avoid unnecessary duplication of investment, were a bad idea?

**Mr Brocklebank:** No. The idea was right, but it is the business of putting the idea into practice that seems to have got bogged down in bureaucracy, as Roseanna Cunningham and others have said. That seems to be the case with many of the targets.

Recycling is not always economically viable and, by the time the financial and environmental costs of reclaiming the products and transporting them around the country are calculated, it is not always the best solution. However, the answer is not simply to send waste that has not been recycled to landfill; after all, the Executive also has targets to reduce the amount of waste that is sent to landfill. The Executive hopes to reduce the amount of such waste to 1.5 million tonnes by 2006. As John Scott pointed out, far from decreasing, the amount of landfill waste has been increasing over the past two years—it has gone up to 1.8 million tonnes.

Targets seem only to restrict the ability of local authorities to implement the best waste management solutions for their areas. John Scott and Jamie McGrigor mentioned the potential solution of advanced thermal treatment, which—in spite of the doubts that Mark Ruskell expressed—councils should be considering. ATT involves the treatment of waste at very high temperatures in developments that, because of their small scale, avoid the planning pitfalls that affect incinerators. The bulk of the eventual waste is water and heat. The heat can be used directly or converted to energy—at best, it can be used for both. As ATT offers the added value of meeting renewable energy targets, it should surely commend itself to Mark Ruskell. SHREWS, which is a Scottish development company that is based only a few miles from the centre of Edinburgh, is among the pioneers of ATT. Why is the Executive not pursuing that technology more vigorously?

I think that Mark Ruskell accused John Scott of clear-blue-sky thinking, which I have not heard much about. I will resist the temptation to say that Mark Ruskell and the Greens sometimes indulge in pie-in-the-sky thinking, although on this occasion Mark Ruskell made some valuable points, especially on waste minimisation.

Much could be said, and doubtless will be said, about Mike Pringle's proposed levy on plastic bags. Basically, they account for only 0.3 per cent of household waste. However, his Environmental Levy on Plastic Bags (Scotland) Bill highlights some important points, particularly in relation to litter. I am somewhat intrigued, especially in light of the minister's reaction to what Jamie McGrigor said, as to why the Executive has not thrown its full weight behind Mike Pringle's bill.

The minister glided elegantly away from Mark Ruskell's question. Perhaps that is because the minister's forthcoming waste prevention action plan intends to deal with the very issues that have been raised in Mike Pringle's member's bill. I look forward to the comments of the Deputy Minister for Environment and Rural Development on that when she sums up. Alternatively, in the spirit of what Alasdair Morgan said earlier, if the minister would prefer, I would be happy to discuss the matter with her over scallops in any one of the three award-winning fish restaurants in my part of the country, which is north-east Fife. Perhaps she could indicate whether she would be happy to take me up on that invitation.

16:41

**Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):** The Parliament has expressed many different views about the progress that is being made on implementing the national waste plan. I welcome the minister's recent consultations, in particular those covering commercial recycling and waste prevention.

The household is the starting point for municipal waste; the small business is the starting point for thinking about how best to encourage more people to get involved in the process on the business side. We must use the debate to measure the progress that has been made in those directions. Members from all parts of the chamber have raised matters that illustrate how often the intention is affected by how the relevant regulations have been set up.

There is a tendency to demand that people behave in a different way. Such a negative approach cannot possibly take us forward. I was particularly unhappy with remarks made by the chief executive of Friends of the Earth Scotland, Duncan McLaren, at the weekend. He called on the Executive

"to set out what action it will take against those councils that fail to pull their weight."

I do not believe that imposing more unnecessary penalties is the way to deal with this. As Roseanna Cunningham pointed out, Perth and Kinross Council's approach to dealing with waste means that it faces the threat of fines—because bureaucracy is getting in the way of developments there. That is very unfair. To encourage people to come along, we should recognise that some councils are starting from a difficult base.

**Eleanor Scott:** Would the member like to explain how he would compel councils to comply with the national targets?

**Rob Gibson:** Our party believes in local government working in partnership with the Scottish Government. That principle would be accepted by most people as the way forward. Everyone has to get involved in minimising waste and so on. The member may disagree, but I will come back to that.

I have some news for Maureen Macmillan. I hope that, sometime during its meeting today, Highland Council's transport, environmental and community services committee will consider recycling plastic bottles. The question is how the council can collect them and transport them to where they can be recycled. That is a major area where the Executive can help the process along.

The Environmental Levy on Plastic Bags (Scotland) Bill has been discussed. In evidence to the Environment and Rural Development Committee, British Polythene Industries plc made the point that it is the UK's largest manufacturer of polythene film products as well as the UK's largest recycler of polythene waste. John Langlands of British Polythene Industries pointed out that the company could recycle any scrap of polythene. Indeed, he said that the company's recycling capacity could be increased by 100 per cent, even using existing plant.

The question arises again, however, of who will transport the waste plastic to such factories. The waste programme has to tackle such issues. The Government has to give a lead; it needs to show from the centre how it will expedite progress on the potential of the waste plan. It needs to do so by means of simpler regulation and by helping commerce to make progress. By enabling recycling to be done locally, the Government can ensure that the transportation of waste is minimised.

**John Scott:** Has the member costed those proposals? What subsidy would be required to transport unviable materials to destinations where they could be used?

**Rob Gibson:** That is precisely the kind of work that has to be done to make the programme realistic. Some goods cannot be transported. We heard talk of oil being exported—I think that it was from Shetland—which is ridiculous. Waste products have to be dealt with as locally as possible.

In talking about local recycling and reuse, no member has mentioned the burning of tallow as a fuel, in which the National Farmers Union of Scotland is interested. It appears that 22 EU member states will not enforce the waste incineration directive punitively against the burning of tallow to create heat. The point is that we are looking for a lead from the Executive to deal with that.

Anaerobic digestion needs certification and needs to be done locally. AD, of course, is the use of co-digest animal manures with source separated organic wastes from food processing and households. The Westray Development Trust sees as a barrier to development the fact that we do not have certification for anaerobic digestion, which could be done in many parts of the country. I hope that the minister can tell the chamber how such practical problems can be dealt with at this stage of the waste development strategy.

Many positive issues emerge from the debate, one of which is that the waste industry in Scotland could create between 10,000 and 12,000 additional jobs. I would like to hear from the minister how the waste strategy will increase the possibility of those jobs being created. Also, although more jobs are created in the interim, as we move towards zero waste how will those jobs minimise and become different kinds of jobs?

We need a strategy that moves towards the goal of zero waste, but we cannot have such a policy until the Government explains how it can be achieved. The SNP amendment says so, but the Green amendment does not.

16:48

**The Deputy Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Rhona Brankin):** There has been good debate and many wide-ranging contributions from members right across the chamber. I will do my best to answer some of the specific questions and to touch on as many of the issues as I can in the time that I have been allowed.

Despite what was said in some of the Conservative speeches, there is consensus across the chamber that we are, rightly, moving away from landfill and towards recycling, composting and other technologies that allow us to deal with waste. Our work in this area has been underpinned by the financial resources that have

been made available through the strategic waste fund. It has supported local authorities as they improve recycling facilities, divert waste from landfill and prevent waste from arising.

Several members referred to zero waste and a number talked more broadly about the need for waste prevention. The Executive is committed to a policy of minimising waste and of raising awareness of waste. We have got to get beyond the rhetoric of the debate. Indeed, as Ross Finnie explained, we plan to issue a wide-ranging consultation on waste prevention.

I will outline some of the work that the Executive is already doing or funding in the area of waste prevention. WRAP is carrying out its work with retailers, home composting and real nappies. We have provided £2 million to local authorities to enable them to carry out audits of their own waste, which is crucial. Dundee City Council has estimated that around 7.9 per cent of the municipal waste in its area is generated by the council itself. Local authorities can set an example on how to minimise waste.

We have asked non-departmental public bodies that are sponsored by the Executive to produce environmental management statements, including what they are doing to minimise waste.

Reference has already been made to the eco-schools initiative, which helps to ensure that children become aware of environmental issues at an early stage in life. It is encouraging to see that 2,000 schools have registered with the eco-schools programme, and that more than 200 have been awarded green flags.

**Richard Lochhead:** The minister will be aware that the Scottish Government will soon have a budget of £30 billion a year, which is a lot of spending power. How does the Government intend to use that spending power to increase demand for recycled products?

**Rhona Brankin:** I intend to carry on with my speech, because in it I will elaborate on those points. I hope that Richard Lochhead will let me get on with it.

We fund bodies such as Envirowise and the business environment partnership to advise business on how to minimise waste. Several members have mentioned the importance of business, to which I will refer later.

Shiona Baird was extremely critical of local authorities, but I do not share that criticism. Yes, there is more to do, but I suggest that the member examines the most recent figures for the first quarter of this financial year, which show that 21 authorities are now recycling more than 20 per cent of municipal waste. As the member for Midlothian, I am particularly pleased that

Midlothian Council has made great progress with recycling, which is up from 4.5 per cent in 2004-05 to 21 per cent in the first quarter of 2005-06. Well done, Midlothian. Mention has also been made of the business environment partnership. Ministers are well aware of the success of its programmes. I was a judge in the awards scheme in Midlothian. Along with other ministers, I think that it does a great job. Once again, well done Midlothian.

**Mr Ruskell:** Will the minister give way?

**Rhona Brankin:** I must make progress.

Maureen Macmillan raised concerns about Highland Council, to which we have already provided funding to implement recycling and composting schemes. I have invited the council to make a further application to the strategic waste fund to extend those schemes. Any further application will be considered against economic benchmark costs, which take account of rurality and other demographic factors to determine whether proposals meet the value-for-money considerations.

It would be premature at this stage to reach a view on the likelihood of penalties under the landfill allowance scheme, but ministers have the discretion to waive them. When considering whether to exercise that discretion, ministers would take account of all relevant factors, including what steps the authority had taken to comply with its obligations.

Roseanna Cunningham raised some points about Perth and Kinross Council. We understand some of them, but there were no delays in releasing funds in phase 1 where the local authority plans demonstrated best value. Phase 2 is complex, and we were asked to give more time, so we set a deadline of 31 January 2006. We will assess all bids, including that of Perth and Kinross, and allocate funds throughout Scotland.

John Scott, in an unrelentingly negative speech, said that landfill is increasing, but that simply is not true. Recycling is having an impact, despite the growth of waste. In 2004-05, 1.724 million tonnes of biodegradable municipal waste was sent to landfill. That had fallen to 1.670 million tonnes for the year from July 2004 to June 2005. We are making progress, but there is a lot more to do.

Helen Eadie referred to the exciting developments at Westfield recycling park. Ministers are aware of those, and are aware of the plans of the Westfield energy plant. Indeed, officials have had discussions with the company involved. Marlyn Glen raised the important issue of energy from waste.

I turn to business waste. We have heard that SMEs sometimes make the point that it is not always easy for them to find recycling facilities. To

help them, the Scottish waste awareness group is preparing a recycling resource directory, which will provide comprehensive information for businesses on the recycling services that are available in their local area.

WRAP intends to support trials on the collection of trade waste for recycling, to help establish which systems work best when collecting materials from SMEs. We have issued a consultation on the sustainable management of waste by business and public sector organisations in Scotland, a key aim of which is to seek views from SMEs on the barriers that prevent them from recycling and avoiding waste. When the responses are in, we will work with SEPA and bodies such as the Federation of Small Businesses in Scotland to find out what more can be done to tackle the barriers to recycling that small businesses may face.

Sarah Boyack, Richard Lochhead and others referred to the hugely important issue of markets. As Ross Finnie and others said, recycled material has a wide variety of uses. WRAP and Remade Scotland actively help to develop markets for recycled products. They run procurement programmes to encourage public bodies and others to specify recycled material when letting contracts. We are consulting on proposals to set targets on the use of recycled material for almost all public procurement building contracts. The proposals include a suggested target that 10 per cent of materials that are used in construction projects should be made from recycled materials. The consultation, which closes tomorrow, also suggests possible targets on recycled material in relation to the procurement of paper products. Several local authorities, including Stirling Council, Dundee City Council, Glasgow City Council and Aberdeen City Council already set requirements for recycled content in construction projects.

Several members referred to the community recycling sector, which is hugely important. To help develop and promote the sector, we fund the Community Recycling Network for Scotland. The CRNS is carrying out a study that will map out the sector, which is diverse, and help the Executive to consider how best to support it. We already provide significant financial support for the sector: our INCREASE programme provides grants to community recycling bodies and we have announced that £2.5 million will be available in 2006-07 and in 2007-08 to support the community recycling sector. As well as tackling waste, the community recycling sector brings social inclusion benefits, such as employment and training opportunities for the disadvantaged and provides furniture for people who are on low incomes. We take that important sector seriously and we welcome the contribution that it makes.

Mike Pringle referred to his Environmental Levy on Plastic Bags (Scotland) Bill. We have not taken a view on the bill, but we recognise that it raises several complex issues. We look forward to the Environment and Rural Development Committee's report and the subsequent vote on the bill at the end of stage 1.

There is general agreement that we need to move away from our historical reliance on landfill. The national waste plan lays out how we will achieve that. Following significant investment through the strategic waste fund, the landscape of waste management is changing and we are beginning to see results. Recycling rates have increased significantly and the public now have increased access to recycling facilities. We have provided people with the information that they need to recycle through the waste aware Scotland campaign, which is co-ordinated by the Scottish waste awareness group.

I will take no lessons from the Conservatives on the issue. The legacy that we inherited from the Conservative Government in 1997 was nothing short of a disgrace. Scotland under the Conservatives had the worst recycling record in Europe. We have achieved a lot, but we have more to do. We need to build on the progress that has been achieved to date in relation to recycling household waste. We are taking action to tackle waste growth and we are addressing non-municipal waste. We have made progress, but we appreciate that more is still to be done. The Scottish Executive and, I believe, most members, are up for the task. I believe fervently that the Scottish public are up for the challenge, too; indeed, in some cases, the public are ahead of politicians. I urge members to support the motion.

## Point of Order

17:00

**Tricia Marwick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. At First Minister's question time today, I asked the First Minister about work that needs to get under way in response to the Forth Estuary Transport Authority's survey for a new Forth road bridge. The First Minister said that it would be stupid of us to carry out such work in the absence of information. In the public domain this afternoon, there is a paper that suggests that, by 2019, the bridge will close to all traffic. Is it acceptable that the First Minister knew of that and refused to refer to it in the chamber today?

**The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid):** I had 10 seconds' warning of this point of order. I am not au fait with all the details, but I suggest that you take up the matter directly with the Executive. It is not a matter for me in the Parliament.

## Decision Time

17:00

**The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid):** There are eight questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that amendment S2M-3584.2, in the name of Shona Robison, which seeks to amend motion S2M-3584, in the name of Lewis Macdonald, on dentistry, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

### FOR

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)  
 Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)  
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)  
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)  
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)  
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 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) (Ind)  
 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)  
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)  
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)  
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)  
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)  
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

### AGAINST

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)  
 Arbuckle, Mr Andrew (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)  
 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)  
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)  
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)  
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)  
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)  
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)  
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)  
 Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)

Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)  
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)  
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)  
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)  
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)  
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)  
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)  
 Glen, Marilyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)  
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)  
 Gordon, Mr Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)  
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)  
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (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)  
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)  
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)  
 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)  
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)  
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)  
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (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)  
 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)  
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)  
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)  
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)  
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)  
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)  
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)  
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)  
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)  
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)  
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)  
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)  
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)  
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)  
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)  
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)  
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 33, Against 85, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The second question is, that amendment S2M-3584.1, in the name of Nanette Milne, which seeks to amend motion S2M-3584, in the name of Lewis Macdonald, on dentistry, 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)  
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (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)  
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)  
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)  
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)

#### AGAINST

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)  
 Arbuckle, Mr Andrew (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)  
 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)  
 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)  
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)  
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)  
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)  
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)  
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)  
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)  
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)  
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)  
 Glen, Marilyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)  
 Gordon, Mr Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)  
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)  
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (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)  
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)  
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)  
 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, Campbell (West of Scotland) (Ind)  
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)  
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)  
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)  
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)  
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)  
 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)  
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)  
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)  
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)  
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)  
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)  
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)  
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)  
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)  
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)  
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)  
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)  
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)  
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)  
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)  
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

#### ABSTENTIONS

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)  
 Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)  
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)  
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)  
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)  
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Lochhead, Richard (North East Scotland) (SNP)  
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)  
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 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)  
 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 16, Against 72, Abstentions 29.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The third question is, that amendment S2M-3584.3, in the name of Carolyn Leckie, which seeks to amend motion S2M-3584, in the name of Lewis Macdonald, on dentistry, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

#### FOR

Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)  
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)  
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)  
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)  
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (Ind)  
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)  
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)  
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)

#### AGAINST

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)  
 Arbuckle, Mr Andrew (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)  
 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)  
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 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)  
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)  
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)  
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)  
 Gordon, Mr Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)  
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)  
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (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)  
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)  
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)  
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)  
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)  
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)  
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)  
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)  
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)

McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)  
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)  
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 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)  
 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)  
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)  
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)  
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)  
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)  
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)  
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)  
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)  
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)  
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)  
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)  
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)  
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)  
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)  
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

#### ABSTENTIONS

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)  
 Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)  
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)  
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)  
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)  
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Lochhead, Richard (North East Scotland) (SNP)  
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)  
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 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)  
 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 8, Against 80, Abstentions 30.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The fourth question is, that motion S2M-3584, in the name of Lewis Macdonald, on dentistry, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

#### FOR

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)  
 Arbuckle, Mr Andrew (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)  
 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)  
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)  
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)  
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)  
 Gordon, Mr Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)  
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)  
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (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)  
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)  
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)  
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)  
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)  
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)  
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)  
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)  
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)  
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)  
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)  
 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)  
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)  
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)  
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)  
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)

Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)  
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)  
 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)  
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (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)  
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

#### AGAINST

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (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)  
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)  
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central 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)  
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)  
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (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)  
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)  
 Lochhead, Richard (North East Scotland) (SNP)  
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)  
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (Ind)  
 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 15, Abstentions 29.

*Motion agreed to.*

That the Parliament notes the widespread concern about loss of access to NHS dentists; endorses the view that public resources should be focussed on the provision of NHS dentistry available to all and measures proven to

improve oral health; welcomes the progress that has been made to date in implementing *Improving Oral Health and Modernising NHS Dental Services in Scotland*; recognises the positive developments in improving oral health, supporting dental education and training, increasing the workforce and supporting primary care dental services, and acknowledges the vital contribution which NHS dental services make to health improvement and patient care.

**The Presiding Officer:** The fifth question is, that amendment S2M-3585.1, in the name of Richard Lochhead, which seeks to amend motion S2M-3585, in the name of Ross Finnie, on the waste strategy, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

#### FOR

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)  
 Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)  
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)  
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)  
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)  
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)  
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)  
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (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)  
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)  
 Lochhead, Richard (North East Scotland) (SNP)  
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)  
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (Ind)  
 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)  
 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)

#### AGAINST

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)  
 Arbuckle, Mr Andrew (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)  
 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)  
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 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)  
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)  
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)  
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)  
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)  
 Gordon, Mr Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)  
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)  
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (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)  
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)  
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)  
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)  
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)  
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)  
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)  
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)  
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)  
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)  
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)  
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 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)  
 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)  
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)  
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)  
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)  
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)  
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)  
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)  
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)  
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)  
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)  
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)  
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)  
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)  
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)  
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 38, Against 78, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The sixth question is, that amendment S2M-3585.2, in the name of Alex Johnstone, which seeks to amend motion S2M-3585, in the name of Ross Finnie, on the waste strategy, 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)  
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (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)  
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)  
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)

#### AGAINST

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)  
 Arbuckle, Mr Andrew (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)  
 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)  
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)  
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)  
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)  
 Gordon, Mr Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)  
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)  
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (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)  
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)  
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)  
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)  
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)  
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)  
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (Ind)  
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)  
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)  
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)  
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)  
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)  
 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)  
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)  
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)  
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)  
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)  
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)  
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)  
 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)  
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)  
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)  
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)  
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)  
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)  
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

#### ABSTENTIONS

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)  
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)  
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)  
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (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)  
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)  
 Lochhead, Richard (North East Scotland) (SNP)  
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (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)  
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)  
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)  
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 15, Against 74, Abstentions 29.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The seventh question is, that amendment S2M-3585.3, in the name of Shiona Baird, which seeks to amend motion S2M-3585, in the name of Ross Finnie, on the waste strategy, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

#### FOR

Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)  
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)  
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)  
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)  
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)  
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)  
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)  
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (Ind)  
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)  
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)  
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)

#### AGAINST

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)  
 Arbuckle, Mr Andrew (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)  
 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)  
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 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)  
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)  
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)  
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)  
 Gordon, Mr Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)  
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)  
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (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)  
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)  
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)  
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)  
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)

Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)  
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)  
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)  
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)  
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)  
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)  
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 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)  
 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)  
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)  
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)  
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)  
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)  
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)  
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)  
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)  
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)  
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)  
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)  
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)  
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)  
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)  
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

#### ABSTENTIONS

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)  
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)  
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Lochhead, Richard (North East Scotland) (SNP)  
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (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 15, Against 80, Abstentions 23.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The eighth and final question is, that motion S2M-3585, in the name of

Ross Finnie, on the waste strategy, be agreed to.  
 Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

**For**

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)  
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)  
 Arbuckle, Mr Andrew (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)  
 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)  
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)  
 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)  
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)  
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)  
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)  
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)  
 Gordon, Mr Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)  
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)  
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (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)  
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)  
 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)  
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)  
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)  
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 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)  
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (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)  
 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)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)  
 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)  
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (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)  
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)  
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)  
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)  
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

#### **AGAINST**

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (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)  
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)  
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)  
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)  
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)

#### **ABSTENTIONS**

Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)  
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)  
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)  
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (Ind)  
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 90, Against 20, Abstentions 8.

#### *Motion agreed to.*

That the Parliament welcomes the progress made in implementing the National Waste Plan; commends the response of the Scottish public to the efforts of local authorities, the community sector, the waste management industry and others which has led to major improvements in Scotland's recycling and composting rate for municipal

waste; acknowledges the increased use of recycled material and the economic opportunities which this creates, and welcomes the Executive's consultation on the Sustainable Management of Waste from Business and Public Sector Organisations in Scotland and its forthcoming consultation on preventing household waste.

## Aboyne Maternity Unit

### **The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh):**

The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S2M-3400, in the name of Mike Rumbles, on Aboyne maternity unit. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

### *Motion debated,*

That the Parliament welcomes the excellent work carried out by staff at Aboyne Hospital's maternity unit; notes that the number of mothers giving birth at Aboyne is increasing, with the number of deliveries rising from 34 in 2003 to 60 in 2004, and notes that the number of bookings has increased by 71 per cent for the coming year; agrees that the unit is an excellent example of health services being delivered locally as advocated by Professor David Kerr in his report, *Building a Health Service Fit for the Future*; further agrees that expectant mothers should have the option of giving birth locally, at Aberdeen Royal Infirmary or in the home; notes with concern the possibility of the unit being closed, and considers that NHS Grampian should work with local people to ensure that the unit remains open.

17:11

**Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD):** I have mixed feelings about raising this issue in a members' business debate. On the one hand, I am pleased to see cross-party support for the motion and I am delighted that the parliamentary authorities and the Parliamentary Bureau have recognised the issue's importance by allowing time for tonight's debate. On the other hand, I am disappointed that matters have come to this. If we had responsive health authorities throughout Scotland that were clearly and demonstrably accountable to the people that they serve, we might not be in the position of having to raise the issue in the Scottish Parliament.

I will outline some of the facts surrounding the issue that is before us. Aboyne maternity unit is part of Aboyne community hospital, which was opened in its modern refurbished building by the Princess Royal on 21 August 2003. Aberdeenshire community health partnership has launched a consultation on the future of five local maternity units, one of which is the Aboyne unit in my constituency. In that consultation, one option is the closure of the Aboyne unit. That has caused outrage among many people on Deeside, as the unit serves people who live as far away as Braemar. From Braemar, people would need to make a 120-mile round trip to the Aberdeen royal infirmary, which is the only other hospital that could possibly take mums-to-be.

The health authorities claim that Aboyne maternity unit is not fully utilised and that it has a problem with staff recruitment. However, when I visited the unit, I discovered some interesting facts, which I have incorporated into the terms of the motion.

**Brian Adam (Aberdeen North) (SNP):** To what extent might the reduced utilisation of Aboyne maternity unit be explained by the erroneous impression that has been created that it is less safe to give birth to a child in Aboyne than it is in Aberdeen?

**Mike Rumbles:** That impression may have been created, but we should all know that the National Childbirth Trust makes the point that most births are safe and that people who want to do so should be able to give birth in their local community.

Given that there were 60 births in the unit last year—up from 34 in the previous year—and that bookings are currently up by 71 per cent, there is clear evidence that utilisation of the unit is increasing. On staffing, the unit is piloting a new way of working that should be successful in ensuring that it does not become short staffed. Indeed, the unit's staffing is at full strength.

When it became known that the health authorities were conducting a consultation on the future of the unit, people were galvanised into action. I have nothing but praise for the group of mums who got together to form an action group—some of them are in the public gallery to observe tonight's debate.

Members of the group have organised a petition to save the unit and they intend to present their petition to the Public Petitions Committee in due course. They also organised the public demonstration that was held on Aboyne green two weeks ago last Saturday. I was delighted to be joined at that demonstration by some of the regional list members of the Scottish Parliament. The organisers had hoped that about 200 people would appear, so I was amazed when some 500 people of all ages turned up to voice their support for the future of the unit. It was great to see so many people at the demonstration—elderly residents, young people, families with young children and even the middle aged—and to see such support from the whole community. It was clear to me that the community on Deeside was speaking with one voice and sending a clear message to our local health authority: hands off Aboyne maternity unit.

I know that the decision on the future of the Aboyne maternity unit lies with Grampian NHS Board and not with the Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care, who will respond to tonight's debate. However, one of the reasons for having the debate is to highlight to the minister the strength of feeling that exists in the community. I ask the minister to confirm in his response to the debate that the Scottish Executive's health policy has not changed and that it still ensures that

"Women have the right to choose how and where they give birth."



That quotation comes from page 51 of "A Framework for maternity services in Scotland", which was published by the Scottish Executive.

On page 206 of volume 2 of "Building a Health Service Fit for the Future", the Executive states, among many other things:

"Maternity services should continue to be delivered as locally as possible."

It is Scottish Executive health policy for health care, including maternity care, to be delivered as locally as possible. I hope that the minister will ensure that that message is delivered to the members of Grampian NHS Board, who are responsible for making the decisions.

It is essential that mums-to-be have a real choice about giving birth. They should be able to choose whether to have their babies at home, in their local community hospital or at Aberdeen royal infirmary. That choice for mums-to-be is supported by Belinda Phipps, who is the chief executive of the National Childbirth Trust. She has written to NHS Grampian to emphasise the point. If people are to have a real choice, facilities must be available locally.

Once again, I thank the Parliamentary Bureau for timetabling the debate. I thank my colleagues from all parts of the chamber who will participate in the debate and those members who turned up to show their support at the demonstration. I also thank the minister in advance. I trust that, when he sums up, he will confirm that our new and refurbished maternity unit in Aboyne fits in very well with the Scottish Executive's policy of delivering maternity care locally.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I have a full list of members who wish to speak, so speeches will be restricted to four minutes.

17:18

**Richard Lochhead (North East Scotland) (SNP):** I congratulate Mike Rumbles on securing this important debate. As one of the MSPs who attended the rally in Aboyne on 29 October and spoke alongside Mike Rumbles and others from the area, I pay tribute to the organisers of the rally and the campaign. They have done a magnificent job in bringing the issue further up the political agenda—and, indeed, on to the Parliament's agenda today.

The campaign group comprises young mothers and expectant mothers. The fact that they have gone out to campaign to save their local maternity unit reflects the strength of feeling in the community in Aboyne, as does the fact that, as Mike Rumbles said, the turnout at the rally was fantastic.

The proposals that Aberdeenshire community health partnership put forward a while back were controversial, especially those on the future arrangements for older people's services, diagnostic and treatment services and, of course, maternity services. There is controversy over other units as well, particularly in Banff and Buchan; no doubt my colleague Stewart Stevenson will refer to that. However, tonight's debate is about Aboyne.

In the early summer, I had the pleasure of visiting Aboyne maternity unit and meeting the staff. I pay tribute to their professionalism. I was impressed by the fact that the unit is a modern facility and the figures show that it is no Mary Celeste. The number of births taking place there has increased by 100 per cent in the past year and there has been a 71 per cent increase in the number of bookings. Indeed, before the day of the rally, my office telephoned the unit to speak to the staff, but was told to call back because they were taking care of a delivery. That is an indication of how active the unit is at the moment.

There is talk of closing the unit and we must ensure that that does not happen. There is talk of other changes as well. One such change is what is called the DOMINO arrangement, whereby a midwife would go to the expectant mother's home, take them into the hospital for a few hours and return them to their home as soon as possible after they had given birth. That would represent a downgrading of the service and I would have concerns if that were to go ahead. We do not want to have any sort of downgrading along those lines.

As Mike Rumbles said, the issue is about choice. If Aboyne closes, in effect the choice of where to give birth will be between Elgin and Aberdeen. I draw the minister's attention to "We just can't let these things happen", the report from the maternity service provision policy group of the Scottish Women's Convention. The report states:

"Women should have informed choice about where and how and in what circumstances they have their babies. This choice should be available to all women in Scotland, regardless of where they live.

A 'one size fits all' approach should not be applied to the provision of maternity services as women have different needs according to their location, their economic background, family circumstances and so on."

This debate takes place against that background; against the background of the Kerr report—which, we are told, has cross-party support—on the delivery of health services; and against the background of the rural development debate. Rural communities have experienced a loss of local facilities such as banks, post offices, shops and schools and the last thing that they want to lose is maternity services, especially in an area such as Aberdeenshire, where there is an aging population. Aberdeenshire has one of the

most quickly increasing age profiles of any area in Scotland. If we want to attract young people to the area, we must make services such as maternity units available locally, as well as having schools, shops, banks and other community facilities. If we do not have such services, young people will not want to move to those areas.

I hope that the minister will respond positively to the debate and not just pass the buck to the local health board. I would like the minister to give a commitment that he will intervene and communicate the Parliament's thoughts and opinions to Grampian NHS Board.

17:22

**Mrs Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con):** I am happy to speak in support of Mike Rumbles's motion to save the excellent maternity service that is provided in Aboyne hospital in west Aberdeenshire. Along with several of my colleagues who represent North East Scotland constituencies, I was delighted to give my support to the rally on Aboyne green a few weeks ago. I was impressed by the large turnout and by the enthusiasm that exists throughout the community for the service, and by the obvious determination to convince Grampian NHS Board that the service must be continued.

It is important for women to be able to choose—within the limits of what is safe for them and their babies—where to have their babies. Clearly, there is a wish among west Aberdeenshire mums to have choice available in the form of local maternity services, which allows them to deliver close to home and to enjoy the peace and tranquillity of a small unit where they can get to know their new babies and receive one-to-one encouragement and support in establishing the breastfeeding routine that we all know gives babies the best start in life. In a small local unit, close relatives, other children and friends have the freedom to visit at less regulated times than those that apply in a big, bustling hospital unit. Furthermore, mother and baby are less likely to be exposed to the serious infections that, sadly, prevail in our larger hospitals.

Unfortunately, mums in other parts of Aberdeenshire no longer have that choice. A few years ago, it was decided that there were not enough births to support the retention of two units in central Aberdeenshire. After a big campaign, the Inch unit was closed and patients were directed to the Jubilee hospital in Huntly. That unit survived for a couple of years but, sadly, the birth rate there fell too, and reached a level at which the midwives did not feel that they were getting enough experience to maintain their skills. That unit withered on the vine and remains closed.

Aboyne is not like that; the birth rate there has been steadily increasing for the past year or two. It is no wonder that it has been, because there are many new houses in the area and young people are moving in from far and wide. The hospital, as we have heard, was totally refurbished a couple of years ago and is a modern and attractive facility in which mums feel welcome and well cared for.

Aboyne maternity unit is not only a good facility. As Mike Rumbles said, it is well placed to serve the needs of a fairly scattered and remote population in a part of the world where transport can be slow and hazardous, particularly in the severe winter conditions that can prevail in Braemar and beyond. It would be wrong for a thriving unit in such a situation to face closure, so I endorse fully the pressure that is being put on Grampian NHS Board to retain the unit. I hope that the minister will apply pressure, too.

I encourage former patients of the unit to spread the word to other mums and possible future mums so that people from upper Deeside and beyond have choice in where to give birth, which is no longer available to women in central Aberdeenshire.

I congratulate the save Aboyne maternity unit campaign on its magnificent efforts and I wish it well in its progress to what I hope will be a successful result. Well done, one and all.

17:25

**Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab):** I congratulate Mike Rumbles on securing the debate and I congratulate in particular all those who are involved in the save Aboyne maternity unit campaign on their success in bringing this important issue to public attention and to the Parliament.

I apologise to Parliament for having to leave for a prior engagement before the minister responds to the debate. I will read his response with great interest and I am sure that he will consider carefully the points that have been raised.

In no way do I criticise the national health service in Grampian for embarking on a process of consultation on and scrutiny of maternity services in the region. It is right to ensure that maternity services are structured in the best way to meet patients' needs. I look forward to discussing the issues with some of the people who are involved in the community health partnership when I meet them to follow up a letter that I wrote to NHS Grampian and to the Minister for Health and Community Care to highlight concerns that my constituents have expressed to me about some of the proposals for reorganising maternity services, particularly in Aboyne and Fraserburgh. I also look

forward to meeting representatives of the save Aboyne maternity unit campaign tomorrow.

I have yet to have those meetings, but I am aware of the strength of the campaign's arguments, to which Mike Rumbles and others have referred. I will dwell on a couple of those arguments. First, it is bizarre to implement what is termed the most radical option—closure of the unit—only two years after a major refurbishment. That is not sensible planning.

The second issue is current use of the unit. As the motion says, the number of mothers who gave birth at the unit increased from 34 in 2003 to 60 in 2004 and the number of bookings has increased by 71 per cent. That should be compelling evidence for the health board and should dispel the idea, to which others have referred, that a facility that is located in a rural area will not be well used and will not experience an increase in use.

Tonight's debate reminds me of the discussion about closing rural schools, when councils say that schools should close because their rolls are likely to fall, despite the fact that rolls are increasing. Agencies such as health boards must consider the fact that many people are moving from urban to rural areas. Some trends suggest that demand for such rural facilities will increase, rather than subside. The figures suggest that that is the case with the Aboyne maternity unit.

I have no doubt that we will raise the issues again with the health board when we meet it next week. I look forward to the other meetings that I will have on the issue and I hope that the minister will do all that he can to ensure that NHS Grampian gives thorough and serious consideration to the points that have been made by those who have argued strongly the case for retaining the maternity unit in Aboyne.

17:28

**Shiona Baird (North East Scotland) (Green):** Normally, we congratulate the member who secured the debate. I congratulate Mike Rumbles, but I take on board his concern that we should not be having the debate. Why should young families and mothers with babies spend so much of their precious time campaigning against something that should never be on the agenda? It is important to recognise the extent of the effort that is put into campaigns against such measures. Individuals throughout the country give up their time to campaign against such proposals.

Reference has been made to the Kerr report. Many of the points that I would like to make have already been made, but in debates of this sort it is important to repeat and constantly reinforce points. The Kerr report's recommendation for maternity services focused on improving access to

maternity services for people who are excluded or disadvantaged through poverty or geography. Both factors apply in Aboyne. As Mike Rumbles said, the report also recommends that maternity services continue to be delivered as locally as possible.

Richard Lochhead referred to the report by the Scottish Women's Convention. I recommend that all members read it, because it makes some important points.

I am a mother of four—I mean five. I forgot one. I am also a grandmother of four, which is now more important. As a mother of five, I am well aware of the stresses and strains that surround giving birth. The time prior to giving birth is critical. Women need the support of their families and do not want to worry about travelling many miles, possibly in adverse weather conditions. They do not want to worry about whether their family has the ability or the money to visit them. It has been suggested that many ambulance crews are equally unhappy about having to take mothers, especially first-time mothers or women who are expecting high-risk babies, on long journeys to hospital in case they have to cope with an emergency birth.

Such issues need to be taken into account and addressed. Nanette Milne highlighted the need for close bonding at the time of birth—not just between mother and baby, but between the baby and other young children, in particular. There is a real possibility that travelling long distances can increase the incidence of the awful condition of postnatal depression. No one would undergo that if they could avoid it.

We must give women in Aboyne the real choices that have been highlighted. In particular, we must give them the choice to have babies at home. From questions that I have put to NHS Grampian, I am aware that it is not nearly as supportive as it ought to be. The NHS needs to look beyond its budgetary limitations to the wider picture and the issues of rural regeneration that Richard Lochhead highlighted.

17:33

**Mr David Davidson (North East Scotland) (Con):** I congratulate not only Mike Rumbles on securing the debate, but the mothers and children who are products of Aboyne maternity hospital who have joined us this evening.

I was delighted to be in attendance at the rally and to speak at it, along with colleagues who represent North East Scotland and the many councillors who turned up. Aberdeenshire Council has unanimously supported a motion to maintain the service in Aboyne. Other members have said that the building is brand new and fit for purpose,

and that proper investment has been made in it. That decision cannot have been made lightly, so I wonder what is giving rise to queries.

Conservative members have always supported locally delivered health care. When Malcolm Chisholm was the Minister for Health and Community Care, he said that he wanted most health delivery to take place in the community. At a recent health debate, Andy Kerr, the current Minister for Health and Community Care, said clearly that he wanted the health service to meet demand. Demand that doubles year on year should be met, not ignored. Given that the Dee valley is becoming a major development area for new homes, especially starter homes and homes for young families, there is a need to ensure that people do not have to travel long distances or to take the risks that are associated with travel. The demand exists.

All the investment has been made, but still this uncertainty has come about. That is the case in other parts of Aberdeenshire. The Aboyne unit provides care before the birth, during the birth and after the birth; it obviously fits the need.

Ministers in the Executive appoint health board chairmen and I am told that the role of health board chairmen is to deliver Executive policy. It is incumbent on the minister in attendance this evening to say whether he and his colleagues on the health team feel that Executive policy is being delivered. I also raise the point that we are told by Grampian NHS Board that the Arbutnott formula is an issue for it because it does not have the support to deliver rural services to the level that it would like to achieve. I leave it to the minister to come back—if not tonight, then on another occasion—with answers to that question.

We must consider the way that health care, particularly for expectant mums and their families, is delivered in rural areas. The father is often away during the day, so expectant mums need help and support. Ambulances are occasionally manned with only a driver; there is not necessarily a paramedic on board to help with a birth. I know that other members, such as Jamie Stone, have talked in the past about the fact that people do not want to deliver babies up in Caithness because there is risk in undertaking a bad journey on a very bad road—the same applies to the north-east. I wish that the minister would listen and I hope that he intervenes if he can; he does not have the power to intervene directly, but I presume that he can push the Executive policy.

I congratulate the mothers and all those who were in attendance at the rally and I encourage the campaign organisers to keep going in the knowledge that most of us are with them.

17:36

**Stewart Stevenson (Banff and Buchan) (SNP):** I congratulate the mums and the products of their efforts and, of course, the efforts of Aboyne maternity unit. I thank Mike Rumbles for the opportunity to discuss this important issue.

I come to the debate as an Opposition politician to speak in support of Executive policy, because it is clear what Executive policy is and it is clear that we support that policy, which has been articulated on many occasions. A year ago, the draft budget stated that, in the health service,

“investment priorities and service redesign will be matters for frontline staff in partnership with patients.”

I know that the front-line staff and the patients at Aboyne are, as is the case at the other four maternity units, in favour of retaining the unit and developing and building on its success. Three of the other units—the ones in Peterhead, Fraserburgh and Banff—are in my constituency and they, too, sit under the black cloud of uncertainty that has been created by Grampian NHS Board.

This is a rural issue par excellence, but it is not only a rural issue par excellence. Fraserburgh is, in fact, a non-rural area with a population of 15,000; it is the biggest town in Scotland more than an hour away from an acute services unit. The issue goes right down and right through the implementation of health policy in the north-east.

Mike Rumbles gets it spot on in the motion:

“NHS Grampian should work with local people to ensure that the unit remains open.”

That is also true of the units in my constituency. We have heard that 500 people were out on the street in Aboyne, 600 were out in Fraserburgh and a couple of hundred were out in Banff. Frankly, when we energise the women of the north-east, we men should take cover. I have little doubt about the ultimate success of the campaigns.

The Scottish National Party would, of course, make health boards more responsive to what is going on by including on them some elected members, but I do not expect the minister to respond to that point tonight.

Andy Kerr, in the debate on 27 October, re-emphasised the Executive's policy for

“health care to focus more on preventive and continuous care in local communities and to target our resources at those who are at the greatest risk of ill health.”—[*Official Report*, 27 October; c 20029.]

I agree with that policy. If we transfer maternity services away from midwife-led units, we potentially increase the costs, as we will deploy more expensive and more specialised skills and resources at the centre to no purpose.

One of the principles of the report to which members have referred—"A Framework for maternity services in Scotland"—is that

"The consultation processes should involve ... users of services, and the general public."

Involvement is not the end of the story; we have to respond to the needs of

"users of services, and the general public."

There are supposed to be maternity services liaison committees. I must confess that I am not personally aware of one, although there may well be such committees. However, I have not yet seen them come to the table with any great passion.

I will close with a little saying from a guru called Bernard Cox:

"The British Civil Servant ... cannot be bribed to do wrong nor persuaded to do right."

On this occasion, persuasion must triumph and the civil servants must respond to public need and to mothers' and children's needs.

17:40

**Carolyn Leckie (Central Scotland) (SSP):** I am pleased to speak in the debate in support of Mike Rumbles's motion. He will know that such support from me is unusual.

I congratulate the women in the public gallery, who are fighting to keep the Aboyne unit open. They have babies with them and I hope that men are with them also. I am not familiar with the Aboyne unit, but I am familiar with the story that is unfortunately common throughout Scotland—women and families have to fight almost bare knuckled to hang on to services, which they know to be good-quality services that fit their community, because somebody on high has determined, without taking communities' wishes into account, that the services are no longer viable.

Members have referred to the national framework—the report by the expert group on acute maternity services—which has a number of standards, many of which are very good. However, health boards are picking and choosing which standards they want to deploy in the organisation of services. For example, the EGAMS report requires that all women should get one-to-one care when they are in labour, but that does not happen everywhere. We do not see health boards up in arms about that or coming forward with their plans to achieve that standard, but time and again we see them using other aspects of the EGAMS report to justify closures.

As a midwife, I want to put in context my support for maintaining units and my support for midwifery care. Childbirth is a normal life experience and, in

the vast majority of cases, midwifery care is not only the most appropriate care but the best. My difficulty with many of the closures and rationalisations of maternity services is that they are about removing appropriate care from a cohort of women and removing those women from where it is safe and appropriate to have that care. My view on that is reflected in my support for the Wick maternity unit. The issue is not about saying that midwifery care is inferior; it is about where the care is delivered and about ensuring that women get the care that is suitable for them.

I want to pick up on what Richard Lochhead said about DOMINO deliveries. That is a completely appropriate method of delivery and care for women to choose. DOMINO stands for "domiciliary in and out"—women come into hospital in labour, the baby is delivered, they go straight home and there is midwifery care all the way through. Unfortunately, because of resource, staffing and rota problems, that option is not available to as many women as would like it. I argue that we should have more DOMINO services and that everybody should get access to home deliveries, if they so choose. They are safe if the risk has been assessed properly.

The debate on Aboyne maternity services is taking place in the context of an overall lack of confidence about what is happening to our maternity services in Scotland. My confidence about that has been seriously undermined by the Executive's response to three simple written parliamentary questions. Basically, I asked the Executive how many consultant-led maternity units and how many midwife-led units there are in Scotland, how many of each there have been in the past five years and how many consultant-led units are under consultation for closure. The answer to each of those questions was that the figures were not held centrally. The Executive cannot even tell us how many maternity hospitals there are, so how can we have any confidence that our maternity services are safe in the Executive's hands? The Executive cannot even answer basic questions.

17:45

**Dr Jean Turner (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind):** I congratulate Mike Rumbles and all the campaigners. Their cause is close to my heart—and so is Aberdeenshire, because that is where I trained in medicine and anaesthetics before coming back down to Glasgow.

Much of my experience of midwifery involved seeing what can go wrong. However, I know that for the majority of patients—I say "patients", but giving birth should be a normal thing—who have their babies at home, the process is quite normal. I

agree with all the points that have been made about that.

I cannot understand the crazy thinking behind our approach to medical services these days. How can we sustain communities if we do not provide NHS services that allow women to have their babies close to home so that they can also look after their other children and not neglect them? Very pertinent points have been made about postnatal depression.

I say to campaigners: why stop at fighting for Aboyne maternity unit? Why not also fight for consultant-led services? We should be supporting midwife-led services. When things go wrong, as they can on rare occasions, nobody should have to get into an ambulance and be rushed to Aberdeen. That is crazy. We should have trained consultants and anaesthetists, who could rotate. If we do not have enough of them, we should be working towards that. If there is difficulty with training, we should be finding out how to provide that training. There are many ways of doing that. People can go to other countries if the training services to help them learn are not available here. It is not impossible to sort that out.

We should fight for the maternity unit at Aboyne, fight for the excellent midwife-led service and fight for consultants and anaesthetists to come in. Why not do other things close to the community at Aboyne? Anaesthetists would be going there for maternity services, so elective work could be done. More could be done in Aboyne. That would help the community to grow. Everyone should not have to go into Aberdeen.

What is threatened is the silliest thing that I have heard. It is just like getting rid of the consultant-led services from Caithness and Thurso. If members have ever travelled up there, as I did recently, they will know that it is beyond belief that anybody could put someone else's life in danger in that way. Anybody who has been in medicine for as long as I have knows what can happen. Getting rid of services is wrong. We should stop doing so as soon as possible. Patients' safety must come first.

I think that I said in a previous debate that, when I was an anaesthetist in Aberdeen, I once had to go out to Dufftown a second time. A baby had been delivered safely but the afterbirth had not come away. It was an emergency and an obstetrician and an anaesthetist had to go out with a snowplough in front of them.

There are ways of providing local services for people and I wish that we could get our act together to provide the right workforce in the right places to provide the appropriate treatment. We should plan for the future instead of letting our services and our communities shrink. That is

unforgivable, it really is. I hope that the minister will listen to what has been said.

I wish that ministers would do what they say they will do. I wish that they would listen to the people. We are always being told that they want public involvement, so let them listen to what the people want and let them get organised before forcing decisions on people. They should find out what the people want, but they never do. What they do seems to be a sham and I am sick of it.

The minister shakes his head, but most of us feel that we are never listened to. That is why there are so many campaign groups all over Scotland. Those people are yelling to keep their services.

17:49

**Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD):** It gives me no pleasure whatsoever to speak in this debate because it was with sorrow that I learned of the situation that Mike Rumbles and his colleagues face. In Caithness we know that situation all too well, as do others who have spoken.

The very last question that I put to Donald Dewar—which was, in fact, the last question he answered in the chamber of the Parliament's former residence—was about maternity services in Caithness. At that time, there was a question mark over maternity services in the far north. That was in 2000; Donald Dewar died shortly afterwards. I make no apology for raising the subject again; members would be surprised if I did not. We thought that the situation was safe, but in 2003 we had to revisit the possible downgrading of a consultant-led service to a midwife-led service. Many of the important points have already been made, so I can make my speech a bit shorter. If we downgrade a maternity service in such an area—or a dental service, as Jim Wallace said during the debate on dentistry—we fly in the face of economic development and discourage people from moving to some of the more remote parts of rural Scotland.

As Shiona Baird said, the people who will have to travel from Caithness to Inverness will face a round trip of well over 200 miles. That is simply impossible for those who will want to visit mum, such as children, sisters, grannies and friends who will offer peer support. Members who have children will remember what it was like when they had their first child. New mums need valuable advice from friends and family. The nurses and doctors can do so much, but there is nothing like a friendly face with a bunch of flowers and some warm and helpful advice.

I have said before to the Parliament and will say again that God made the geography and the

weather of the northern Highlands. It does not lie at the hand of man to change that. A doctor in Caithness warns that the downgrading of the unit there will ultimately lead to the death of a mother, a child or both. The proposal is no good for the ambulance drivers, either.

We have gone through consultation before. We thought we had sorted the situation out, but we had to revisit it in 2003 and people in Caithness are still talking about it today. Uncertainty hangs over a vital service. The three locums who are there support the retention of a consultant-led service in the north of Scotland, as do 20 of the 23 local GPs in Caithness and thousands of mums, dads, grannies and grandas. Why does the agony continue? Why can we not move in the right direction, put a consultant-led service in place—which is what all thinking people agree on—and then, for God's sake, leave it? Let us stop revisiting that wretched part of the world.

From the bottom of my heart, I wish Mike Rumbles the best of success. I believe that his battle is my battle. During the debate, we have heard the welcome sounds of a young child in the public gallery. I am on my feet because I am concerned about the future of such young children. Good luck, Mike.

17:52

**The Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care (Lewis Macdonald):** The debate has been full and constructive. I start by congratulating Mike Rumbles on securing this evening's slot. I fully appreciate why the work that is being done at Aboyne community maternity unit is valued by people in the Deeside area and am well aware of the value that local communities throughout the north-east place on such units. I have no doubt that the campaigners who are watching the debate in the gallery will continue to make the points that have been reflected so clearly in the speeches of members from all parties.

I am grateful to members—especially Mike Rumbles—for explaining the nature of the decision-making process in such cases, but there are a few points that I want to stress. First, it is important to note that NHS Grampian is some way from making any decision on the future of the Aboyne unit or, for that matter, on any other maternity unit in Aberdeenshire.

With respect to the Aboyne unit, it is worth noting that a new model of service delivery has already been developed locally and that the midwives who deliver the service have provided active leadership in that process. That model, under which the unit is open during the day and on-call coverage is provided during the night, is

being piloted and the findings will be reviewed at a public meeting in March of next year. Whatever the outcome of the pilot, it embodies the creative approach to delivering services that we are strongly in favour of.

**Richard Lochhead:** Although the main focus of the debate is deliveries, does the minister acknowledge that the Aboyne unit plays a valuable role in providing care before birth and after birth, even when the mum has given birth elsewhere? I feel that that point has not been given enough emphasis in the debate.

**Lewis Macdonald:** Indeed. I think that that is one of the factors that will be considered in the review of the present service.

Because the model of delivery at Aboyne is still at a pilot stage, the Aberdeenshire community health partnership does not intend to review the sustainability of the Aboyne maternity unit until after the process is completed in March next year.

As part of its change and innovation plan, the CHP is reviewing—or will review—community maternity services across the area. The process is still at a very early stage, however. The CHP is currently engaging with communities and exploring ideas about what might be done to deliver the right services safely and sustainably. If, after that process is completed, the CHP chooses to make proposals for service change, those proposals will be subject to a further, formal consultation.

All those processes must of course be completed before NHS Grampian comes to a view. If, after that process, the board decided to close Aboyne, or otherwise to make major changes to the service, it would have to satisfy the Minister for Health and Community Care that it had followed the proper procedure and had taken all relevant considerations into account. Because of the way in which services are delivered and decisions are made, the final decision would lie with the health board.

I wish to reflect on some of the points that have been made in the debate on the relationship between the type of service that is being provided and the broader direction of health policy. As has been mentioned, our framework for maternity services stresses our commitment to provide services that are family centred, locally accessible and, often, midwife led. The framework goes on to stress the importance of patient choice, with women having a greater say about where and when they want their child to be delivered. We want to develop that approach in the context of "Delivering for Health", our response to the Kerr report, which stresses the principle of services being "as local as possible" and "as specialised as necessary".

In response to a further point that arose in the debate, following on from our response to the Kerr report, we are establishing a ministerial advisory group to consider a wide range of issues, including the framework for maternity services and the work of the expert group on acute maternity services. From next year, NHS Quality Improvement Scotland will review all services in that context. We are committed to maintaining services as locally as possible while ensuring that we offer sustainable, high-quality specialist services.

We need to acknowledge the changing demands on the service as a whole. We cannot consider single services in isolation. For example, the birth rate at Aboyne has increased, but the birth rate is, more generally, predicted to decline over time, although we are seeking to do something about that, ensuring sustainable demographic growth over the longer term. One of the critical points in the Kerr report and in our response to it is the importance of recognising and accommodating the challenges of having an aging population and the growing incidence of chronic conditions, while looking to NHS boards to consider the best use of their resources and to respond to all the challenges that they face as locally as possible.

**Mr Davidson:** On the point that the minister has just made, and in relation to demands and the reporting of trends, would it not be better to postpone any review of services at Aboyne until after there is an indication that the birth rate is in fact falling off and that demand for maternity services is falling off?

**Lewis Macdonald:** Using that sort of principle, we could wait for ever to make any decisions. We would not want to encourage boards simply to put decisions off. We recognise that services must constantly evolve and that it is primarily the responsibility of individual NHS boards to ensure that that happens. In discharging that responsibility, boards must ensure that any changes are implemented with the active involvement of the local community and, as far as possible, with the support of the local community. The report of the expert group on acute maternity services highlights the importance of stakeholder engagement and that of achieving consensus in the development of new services.

**Mike Rumbles:** Will the minister speak to representatives of Grampian NHS Board? When he does, will he reinforce the position that all members who have spoken in the debate have taken and copy the *Official Report* to the board's members so that they can see MSPs' strength of feeling on this matter?

**Lewis Macdonald:** I would be happy to ensure that NHS Grampian sees the *Official Report*. We are of course in regular contact with all NHS

boards to ensure that they understand the implications of national policy for local service delivery, although we look to boards to make decisions on local delivery for themselves.

We are in no doubt that community maternity units have a key role in the future delivery of maternity services across Scotland. Equally, we recognise that there is no one model that will be appropriate in all geographic and demographic circumstances. Clearly, the situation of an acute hospital at the centre and community maternity around the spokes of the hub, so to speak, is in line with policy.

I agree with the point that Carolyn Leckie made: enabling home births with proper support should be regarded as a positive choice and not as a downgrading. Home births are another form of midwife-led service that works. I am happy to write to her on the distribution of consultant and midwife-led services across Scotland. As ever, my parliamentary answer to which she referred was a factual response; it is for health boards and not for ministers to design and deliver services on the ground and to maintain the statistical information to back them up.

It is right that NHS Grampian has undertaken this process of pre-consultation. The approach is to be welcomed. I do not fully accept Shiona Baird's view that service users should never have to campaign to secure the services they want; I think that the opportunity to express views and influence decisions should be welcomed as part of an active, thriving democracy.

In this case, the community has already taken the opportunity to make its views known. When the innovative service model at Aboyne is reviewed next year, and if a further formal consultation follows on from that, I encourage the community that uses the facilities to continue to make its views known. I have no doubt that it will do so.

*Meeting closed at 18:01.*



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