

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Wednesday 10 May 2006

Session 2

£5.00

© Parliamentary copyright. Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body 2006.

Applications for reproduction should be made in writing to the Licensing Division,
Her Majesty's Stationery Office, St Clements House, 2-16 Colegate, Norwich NR3 1BQ
Fax 01603 723000, which is administering the copyright on behalf of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate
Body.

Produced and published in Scotland on behalf of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body by Astron.

CONTENTS

Wednesday 10 May 2006

Debates

Col.

TIME FOR REFLECTION	25381
POINT OF ORDER	25383
BUSINESS MOTION	25384
<i>Motion moved—[Alasdair Morgan]—and agreed to.</i>	
QUESTION TIME	25385
SCOTTISH SCHOOLS (PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT) BILL: STAGE 3	25391
SCOTTISH SCHOOLS (PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT) BILL	25441
<i>Motion moved—[Peter Peacock].</i>	
The Minister for Education and Young People (Peter Peacock)	25441
Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP)	25443
Lord James Douglas-Hamilton (Lothians) (Con)	25444
Iain Smith (North East Fife) (LD)	25445
Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green)	25447
Mr Kenneth Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab)	25448
Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con)	25449
Dr Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab)	25449
David McLetchie (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)	25451
Mr Adam Ingram (South of Scotland) (SNP)	25451
The Deputy Minister for Education and Young People (Robert Brown)	25452
HOUSING CORPORATION (DELEGATION) ETC BILL	25456
<i>Motion moved—[Malcolm Chisholm].</i>	
BUSINESS MOTIONS	25457
<i>Motions moved—[George Lyon]—and agreed to.</i>	
Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD)	25458
The Deputy Minister for Finance, Public Service Reform and Parliamentary Business (George Lyon)	25458
DECISION TIME	25463
CREDIT UNIONS	25466
<i>Motion debated—[Christine May].</i>	
Christine May (Central Fife) (Lab)	25466
Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP)	25468
Dave Petrie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)	25469
Bill Butler (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)	25470
Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD)	25472
Mark Ballard (Lothians) (Green)	25473
Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab)	25474
Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP)	25476
Mr Charlie Gordon (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)	25477
John Scott (Ayr) (Con)	25478
Mr Frank McAveety (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)	25479
The Deputy Minister for Communities (Johann Lamont)	25480

Oral Answers

	Col.
SCOTTISH PARLIAMENTARY CORPORATE BODY	25385
CowParade Edinburgh 2006	25389
Discrimination	25386
Health Care.....	25388
Holyrood Project Team.....	25385
Post-Completion Advisory Group	25387

Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 10 May 2006

[THE PRESIDING OFFICER *opened the meeting at 14:15*]

Time for Reflection

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): I welcome members back to the chamber, where it is business as usual. As on every Wednesday, our first item of business is time for reflection, which will be led by Father Matt McManus of St Peter's in Ardrossan.

Father Matt McManus (St Peter's, Ardrossan): Presiding Officer, I know that I am not allowed to deviate from my script, but it was good of you to reopen the chamber for my visit.

In July 2004, a fire in the priest's house in Ardrossan killed the priest and destroyed the building. St Peter's is a listed building, so there followed many tortuous discussions with Historic Scotland and others about rebuilding the house. The parishioners were very saddened by the death of their priest. Appointments to parishes take time, but as one of those who had been agitating for the appointment I could not say no when I was asked to move to Ardrossan.

I was very happy in Kilwinning, where I was based for 18 years. I was on good terms with everyone. I was so often a visitor to the mother lodge that people thought I had my own seat. However, I moved—to a splendid little house in a back street of council houses in Ardrossan.

I am not sure now that I am ready to move to the rebuilt priest's house beside St Peter's. The issue is not the moving but the loss of a whole set of experiences that have been thoroughly good for me. Most priests and ministers in Scotland live above the shop, in a sort of Bute House for the poor. That is what I did. The house was imposing enough to deter all but the most persistent—usually those seeking their fare to Stranraer or the price of a bottle of Buckie. The latter usually got help on the grounds of honesty, but the others often did not. It was hard work making the house a welcoming place for God's people, because it was too impressive a building.

Suddenly I found myself living four in a block, with strange noises to the right and left of me. I thought that every passer-by was coming to see me. The ice cream van parked at my door. Remembering on which day the bin lorry came was a nightmare for me. I had to remember to recycle. Outside my window on wet mornings, children would play and dawdle on their way to

school. There were a hundred things to remind me of what I was missing and was in danger of forgetting just by living above the shop.

Priests do not queue for buffets. Priests get umbrellas provided at funerals. Priests get reserved car parking—except at the Parliament—when they attend functions. That is all because we are special in the minds of the people it is our privilege to serve. I am sure that members will be familiar with the picture. Does the not queuing for the buffet, the reserved parking and the honoured-guest status ring a bell? Is there a danger of forgetting where we come from and the people we serve?

My new house—courtesy of an insurance company and Historic Scotland—is now ready. The roof looks strong and the building has come in on time and on budget, but that means that I will be back above the shop.

I simply say this to members present: try to keep in mind the noble aspirations that brought you to this place and never forget the hopes that all of us have invested in you.

Point of Order

14:19

Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I draw your attention to the article in this morning's edition of *The Herald* about a £50 million rescue package for Scottish Enterprise. First, despite the promises of the Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning, *The Herald* has been informed before the Enterprise and Culture Committee or the Parliament. Secondly, the announcement breaches paragraph 16 of the protocol between the Executive and parliamentary committees. Thirdly, members of the Parliament are entitled to know which projects will be affected by the £50 million-worth of reprofiling and delay that is required to bail out Scottish Enterprise.

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): Because you gave me advance notice of your point of order, Mr Neil, I had a chance to look quickly at the press coverage, which is couched in the most speculative language. I am not aware that any formal announcement has been made on the matter, either within or outwith the Parliament. I am sure that the minister responsible is aware of the normal procedures for making such announcements.

Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I appreciate that the language may have been diplomatic, but I think that it was inspired not from heaven but from ministerial office. I think I speak for other members when I say that I would prefer to know that there is some method by which you can warn ministers yet again that Parliament must be given prior notice of such measures.

The Presiding Officer: I said that the language was speculative, not diplomatic. None of the ministers with responsibility in this area is in the chamber, but no doubt they will note the remarks that Ms MacDonald and Mr Neil have made.

Business Motion

14:21

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S2M-4371, in the name of Margaret Curran, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, which sets out a timetable for stage 3 consideration of the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Bill.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that, during Stage 3 of the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Bill, debate on groups of amendments shall, subject to Rule 9.8.4A, be brought to a conclusion by the time indicated (that time limit being calculated from when the Stage begins and excluding any periods when other business is under consideration or when the meeting of the Parliament is suspended, other than a suspension following the first division in the Stage being called, or otherwise not in progress):

Groups 1 and 2: 40 minutes

Groups 3 to 6: 1 hour and 5 minutes

Groups 7 to 9: 1 hour and 40 minutes.—[*Alasdair Morgan.*]

Motion agreed to.

Question Time

SCOTTISH PARLIAMENTARY CORPORATE BODY

14:22

Holyrood Project Team

1. John Home Robertson (East Lothian) (Lab): I am particularly relieved to be able to ask this question in the chamber.

To ask the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body whether it has any plans to recognise the contribution of staff in the Holyrood project team to the achievement of the Holyrood Parliament building. (S2O-9904)

Mr Kenny MacAskill (Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body): I am happy to put on record the corporate body's recognition of the huge contribution to the delivery of the Parliament building that was made by all members of the Holyrood project team, past and present, and by many other parliamentary staff.

John Home Robertson: Will the member acknowledge the loyal and excellent service of about 20 junior and middle-ranking staff in the HPT through phenomenally difficult years? They often dealt with impossible prima donnas in aggravating circumstances, endured the abuse that went with the project and took countless visitors around the construction site. Costs and delays were certainly not their fault. We have the benefit of a prize-winning building that they have helped to achieve. Will the corporate body take active steps to ensure that all those people get the opportunities that they deserve, after the successful completion of their challenging task?

Mr MacAskill: I assume that the opportunities that the member refers to relate to contracts of employment. Some staff of the HPT are on secondment from the Scottish Executive. They are able to compete for jobs that are advertised internally on an equal footing with SPCB staff, and we are happy to allow them to do so, but it would be improper either to create jobs for them or to give them preferential treatment. We sympathise with them, given the position in which many of them find themselves but, unfortunately, the situation is outwith our control, as they are not contracted by us.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton (Lothians) (Con): Will the member acknowledge that the Parliament has won no less than nine architectural awards, two of which are of very considerable international significance? Parliament staff should be congratulated on overseeing that result.

However, if any work is found to be defective, will efforts be made to recover some of the expenditure involved?

Mr MacAskill: Absolutely. The issue that the member raises is subject to constant review, in relation both to recent incidents and to the general progression of the building.

Discrimination

2. John Swinburne (Central Scotland) (SSCUP): To ask the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body what steps it is taking to eliminate discrimination in the Parliament. (S2O-9908)

John Scott (Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body): Eliminating discrimination and promoting equal opportunities are of crucial importance to the SPCB. One of the Parliament's founding principles is to take account of equal opportunities in everything that it does. I believe that we are taking that seriously. There is a genuine commitment across the organisation to address discrimination, and a considerable amount of effort has been put into achieving that. However, the SPCB is not complacent, and it has taken many positive steps to eliminate discrimination. Each year, those steps are reported in the SPCB's equal opportunities report, which highlights examples of good practice in the organisation's work. I hope that the member has read it.

John Swinburne: What steps is the SPCB taking to eliminate the blatant ageism that is currently condoned in this establishment, given the discrimination against those who are more than 75 years old?

John Scott: I am aware that the member wrote to the Presiding Officer on this subject on 9 March and that the Presiding Officer responded on 21 March. There is not a great deal that I can add to that response. However, I can say that the pension scheme is not discriminatory. As members know, the pension scheme for members of the Scottish Parliament was established under transitional powers through Westminster. Various provisions in relation to equal treatment apply without having to be specifically mentioned in the scheme, which was recently amended by order of the Scottish ministers under powers in the Civil Partnership Act 2004.

The SPCB is, of course, alert to the need to ensure that the scheme is up to date, and a review of its provisions is currently under way, with a view to replacing the Scotland Act 1998 (Transitory and Transitional Provisions) (Scottish Parliamentary Pension Scheme) Order 1999 in due course.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): Given the member's recognition of the importance of eliminating discrimination to this institution, can the

SPCB confirm that individuals from foreign academic institutions who are working in the Scottish Parliament under internships are entitled to the same protection from discrimination as salaried employees? The issue is relevant, because some of those foreign institutions practise forms of discrimination that would be illegal if they were practised by institutions in this country. Will the SPCB assess the terms and conditions of interns to ensure that they are not subject to discrimination while they are here?

John Scott: As Mr Harvie would expect, with regard to equal opportunities, interns—who are in the Parliament as our guests—are under the same terms and conditions as our employees. How they are treated in their countries of origin is a matter for those countries, not for the SPCB. Of course we expect guests and interns to be treated in the same way as members of our staff.

Post-Completion Advisory Group

3. Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body whether it will make a statement in respect of the work of the post-completion advisory group and, in particular, whether claims will be pursued by that group in relation to breach of contract by the construction managers in respect of their performance against their contractual obligations and whether Bovis will be sued for the Flour City losses. (S2O-9905)

Mr Kenny MacAskill (Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body): As its name indicates, the post-completion advisory group has been advisory; decisions about any possible claims are not for it to make. The SPCB makes any such decisions on the basis of appropriate advice.

On Flour City, I understand that the member has written to the SPCB to ask to meet us. He has been advised verbally—he will receive a letter to confirm it—that we will be delighted to meet him. We look forward to discussing the matter with him on a suitable occasion.

Fergus Ewing: Is the SPCB aware that Flour City landed a contract worth £7 million on the recommendation of Bovis, as construction manager, despite the fact that Flour City had no assets, no directors and no track record, and that it did not even have a bank account in Scotland? Does the SPCB agree that that was negligent; that part of that negligence involves a failure to procure a parent company guarantee or performance bond; that the claim, if not pursued, may be prescribed in August; and that, therefore, legal action to recover the £4 million that is owed should be taken before then? Is it not time to claim £4 million cashback on the Holyrood project?

Mr MacAskill: I know that the member has taken a considerable interest in this matter, and I thank him for his question. We and our advisers are aware of possible prescription. However, it is probably better to discuss this complicated issue at the corporate body's next meeting, at which we will be delighted to listen to and consider any further comments that the member has to make.

Health Care

4. Carolyn Leckie (Central Scotland) (SSP): To ask the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body what measures it will take to ensure that its policies and procedures will not encourage the further involvement of the private sector in health care. (S2O-9910)

Mr Duncan McNeil (Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body): The Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body has put in place a range of policies and procedures to support the good health and well-being of members, their staff and parliamentary staff. Key to that is the presence of a general practitioner and nurse, which are provided by NHS Fife's occupational health and safety advisory service.

Carolyn Leckie: I hope that the member is aware that, the other week in the Parliament, a stall set up under Unilever's auspices obtained personal health information from staff and MSPs, including whether they were married or pregnant. What will happen to that information? Why were members not informed of the risk that such information would be taken? Why was the stall allowed in the first place? Moreover, why was it used as a substitute for providing services that should be provided by national health service occupational health and community services, not by representatives of a private company dressed up in NHS uniforms?

Mr McNeil: The member has asked many questions, and I will do my best to answer them. The organisers made a late approach to the Parliament to host the exhibition, and Roseanna Cunningham MSP agreed to sponsor it. I should point out that, under the usual procedure, all events and exhibitions must have MSP sponsorship.

The role of the SPCB in this matter is to consider how, for example, such events and exhibitions can fit into the available space without intruding on any other parliamentary activity. It would be a matter of real debate if, despite MSP sponsorship, the SPCB and its members made decisions on exhibitions on a political basis.

On what will happen to the information that was taken on the day, that is a matter for individuals and the people who gathered it. However, we have received assurances that it will not be used

in any way, shape or form. Anyone who wants to request that information back from the company can do so.

CowParade Edinburgh 2006

5. Mike Pringle (Edinburgh South) (LD): To ask the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body whether it will support CowParade Edinburgh 2006 by hosting one of the fibreglass cows on the Parliament estate for the duration of the event. (S2O-9906)

Mr Duncan McNeil (Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body): I confirm that we will indeed host a cow sculpture on the Parliament estate during CowParade Edinburgh 2006. We look forward to her arrival on 15 May.

Mike Pringle: Given the Parliament's original decision not to go ahead with hosting a sculpture, that is great news. As the member knows, I am hosting a CowParade reception in the Parliament and, up to now, I found it a real shame that the Parliament was not going to be involved in the event. However, I am grateful to discover that the corporate body has changed its mind. After all, this is a major international event. Owners of cows include J K Rowling, Nelson Mandela, Elton John—

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): Will you ask a question, Mr Pringle?

Mike Pringle: I am coming to my question, Presiding Officer.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You are not coming to your question—I want it now.

Mike Pringle: A number of young people from Southhouse in my constituency have decorated their own cow. Will the member assure me that space will be found in the Parliament to display it at the reception on 24 May?

Mr McNeil: As Mike Pringle knows, there was some discussion between officials and organisers about the role that the Parliament could best play. However, at the time, we could not take a quick decision because of other pressing matters—at which point I should say that we are pleased to be back in the chamber. However, we are delighted that we will now take part in the event. We wish it and Mike Pringle's reception well. We hope that the event will raise much needed and deserved money for charities in Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That ends questions to the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body. The next item of business will be stage 3 proceedings for the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Bill.

Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West) (Ind): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I was under the

impression that a minimum of 15 minutes was allocated for questions to the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body. However, we fell far short of 15 minutes; the clock showed that we had only about 12 and a half minutes.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I was due to start the script for the stage 3 proceedings at 2.34 and I would have been starting at 2.35. It was for me to decide when I moved to the stage 3 proceedings.

Dennis Canavan: I wrote to the Presiding Officer following what happened two weeks ago, when there was an early blowing of the whistle at question time. What has happened is completely unacceptable. I pointed out to the Presiding Officer that such things would not happen in Westminster or in any other Parliament in the world, and that they should not happen in the Scottish Parliament. If 15 minutes are allocated for questions, 15 minutes at least should be allowed, rather than the Presiding Officer blowing the whistle before full time.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I inform you, Mr Canavan, that the time allocated is up to 15 minutes and that it is for me to decide when to move on. The time allocated for the next proceedings is very tight and I gave you as much time as I possibly could.

Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Bill: Stage 3

14:37

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): We move now to stage 3 proceedings on the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Bill. I want first to make the usual announcement about the procedures that will be followed. First, we will deal with amendments to the bill, and then we will move to the debate on the motion to pass the bill. For the first part, members should have the bill as amended at stage 2—that is, SP bill 45A—the marshalled list containing all the amendments that have been selected for debate and the groupings that I have agreed.

In relation to amendments, the division bell will sound and proceedings will be suspended for five minutes before the first division of the afternoon. The period of voting for that division will then be 30 seconds. Thereafter, I will allow a voting period of one minute for the first division after a debate, and a period of 30 seconds for all other divisions.

Section 1—Duty of Scottish Ministers and of education authorities to promote involvement of parents in school education etc.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Group 1 relates to parental involvement in pre-school education. Amendment 7, in the name of the Minister, is grouped with amendments 8, 27, 12, 14, 15 and 19.

The Deputy Minister for Education and Young People (Robert Brown): The Executive amendments in this group are of one purpose: they seek to recognise the importance of involving the parents of children in pre-school education in a way that is proportionate and appropriate to the overall focus and aim of the bill.

The Education Committee took an interest in the area covered by this first group of amendments, when amendment 47 was agreed to at stage 2. That amendment extended the duty on Scottish ministers to promote parental involvement to cover the parents of children who attend pre-school publicly funded nurseries. I am grateful to Fiona Hyslop for raising the issue. We have considered it very carefully and feel that amendment 47 took the wrong approach. This is not really a matter for the Executive; arrangements that are much more local are required. Accordingly, amendment 7 now asks the Parliament, in effect, to take back amendment 47.

Similarly, the Executive will today ask colleagues in the Parliament to reject Fiona Hyslop's amendment 27, which seeks to take

things a stage further and extend the duty to education authorities. In fairness, the new amendment 27 is much more relevant than the previous amendment 47, but we still feel that what it proposes is not the right way to proceed. It does not reflect what happens on the ground.

We are committed to joining up early years and primary school education to ensure that all children transfer smoothly from one sector to the other. To achieve that effectively, we must use the methods that are right for each sector. The bill has been designed with school education in mind and we do not believe that it is necessary to apply all the bill's provisions to the early years sector. They would not always be appropriate.

Parental involvement is already a significant feature of pre-school education—probably more so then than in the later stages of school—in that parents have strong and, in most cases, daily contact with the staff who are working with their children. The opportunity for parents to engage in their children's learning and to keep in touch with their children's development is much greater at this stage of education than it is later on. We therefore do not want the bill's provisions to be applied indiscriminately to pre-school provision.

However, we recognise the importance of contact between the primary and pre-school sectors. Therefore, we have lodged Executive amendment 14 to help to develop closer ties between primary schools and pre-school centres. Amendment 14 seeks to add to the functions of parent councils the promotion of contact between school parent forums and providers of nursery school education. That will build on the provision that the bill makes for councils to promote contact with parents of prospective pupils of a school. Amendment 14 is a useful amendment that reacts to the concerns that were expressed by Fiona Hyslop and the rest of the Education Committee.

The definition that we have used in the context of promoting contact is broader than that proposed by Fiona Hyslop because it includes the independent and voluntary sectors. I would argue that the promotion of contact between parents at local level is a more direct and beneficial way of promoting parental involvement than the approach that Fiona Hyslop advocated at stage 2 and the one that she proposes in amendment 27.

The approach that we are taking will be supported by statutory guidance. We will issue guidance to education authorities on the development of strategies for parental involvement. That will highlight the need for education authorities to consult early years providers when developing those strategies and to support parent councils in their promotion of contact with those providers.

In addition, the Executive already provides statutory guidance on the delivery of pre-school education that local authorities must take account of in meeting their legal duty to provide such education. That guidance is due to be redrafted, and we will take that opportunity to reflect the bill's provisions on the need to involve parents in pre-school education and to help them to support their children in the transition to primary school.

Ministers also issue care standards, which require early years education providers to work in partnership with parents. We will consider whether those standards need to be strengthened in the light of the bill. Similarly, we want to explore the scope that inspections offer to encourage promotion of parental involvement in the early years. The strong package of measures that is already in place, together with the new provisions on promoting contact between parents and providers that are contained in amendment 14, will create the proper balance and focus.

Amendments 12, 15 and 19 are consequential to the approach that I have outlined. They will ensure that parent councils notify interested parties of their function of promoting contact with providers of nursery education. I ask members to support amendment 7 and to resist amendment 27. I hope that Fiona Hyslop will recognise that we have responded appropriately and properly to the point that she made at stage 2 by not moving amendment 27.

I move amendment 7.

Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP): I will focus my remarks on amendments 7, 27 and 14. I am pleased that the Executive has responded to the Education Committee's demands that early years education be addressed. The Executive has proposed a three to 18 curriculum. Three-year-olds and four-year-olds attend nursery education that is provided by the state. There will be an anomaly in the bill unless we accept the arguments of the Scottish National Party and the committee on the need to address early years education.

A parent of a child who attends a nursery that is associated with a primary school will be encouraged by ministers and the local council to become involved in their child's education, but a parent of a three-year-old or a four-year-old who is in a stand-alone council nursery school will not receive such encouragement. There will be an imbalance in the bill unless members support amendment 27 and reject amendments 7 and 8.

We recognise that early intervention and support and early years education can allow youngsters to make a great start, but we know that the transition from nursery school to primary 1 can be highly problematic. If we acknowledge that parental

involvement is a key factor in successful attainment for youngsters, it is important that we support such involvement. That is why, both for continuity purposes and so that there is equity in the rights of parents across the sector, it is vital that parental involvement in the education of three-year-olds and four-year-olds is recognised.

The effect of amendment 7 would be that Scottish ministers would have no duty to promote parental involvement in early years education. That is a highly questionable proposal, especially when the committee decided unanimously that the Executive should be responsible for promoting parental involvement in the education of children who attend publicly funded nursery schools. Amendment 27 is about imposing on councils a responsibility to promote parental involvement.

I have no problems with amendment 14. I am pleased that the minister has suggested that contact with the providers of nursery education should be promoted, but why is he happy to give the responsibility for establishing such contact to parent councils and parent forums when he is shirking his responsibility—and allowing councils to shirk their responsibility—to promote parental involvement? The two things are not mutually exclusive. We can build into the bill a recognition that early years education is a key factor in education and that parental involvement should be encouraged at all levels, and not only by the local authority.

I urge the chamber to reject amendments 7 and 8 and to support amendment 27, which would ensure that councils also have a responsibility in this area. I am pleased to support the minister on amendment 14, which provides for a useful arrangement for the promotion of parental involvement at the local level. We should not forget the big picture: the Executive should not be let off the hook, but should ensure that local authorities have a duty to promote parental involvement in early years education.

14:45

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton (Lothians) (Con): I support the case that Fiona Hyslop has just made. The minister has lodged a number of extremely useful amendments on parental involvement in pre-school education and we will support his amendments 12, 14, 15 and 19. Amendments 12 and 14 will give the parent council the function of promoting contact between primary schools and nurseries. We support and welcome that aim.

Unfortunately, the minister also lodged amendments 7 and 8 to delete provisions that place a duty on Scottish ministers to promote parental involvement in nursery schools. We do

not support those amendments. The early years of a child's development are pivotal to his or her future development and we believe that ministers and parent councils should promote parental involvement in nursery schools.

We will support Fiona Hyslop's amendment 27, which provides for a duty on local authorities to promote the involvement of parents of children who attend local authority nursery schools. We urge the chamber to support amendment 27 for the reasons that I have set out.

Mr Adam Ingram (South of Scotland) (SNP): If the bill is to reach beyond changing the structure of parental representation to encouraging the greater participation of parents in their children's learning, we will need to achieve a culture change in parental attitudes. That can best be effected by building parental involvement from early on. We should start with the parents of children in early years child care and education settings and continue with the parents of children in primary and secondary school years.

I welcome the concessions that the minister has made to the committee following the debates at stage 2 in adding contact with parents of pre-school children to the functions of parent councils, which Fiona Hyslop mentioned. However, the provision is considerably weaker than one that would place a duty on education authorities to promote the involvement of parents of prospective pupils. Surely education authorities are better placed and resourced to make contact with and inform such parents than parent councils would be. Fiona Hyslop's amendment 27 strengthens the Executive's amendment 14 and I urge the chamber to support it.

Dr Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab): I speak in support of the minister's approach, which reflects the concerns that the committee raised on the need for parents of pre-school children to become more involved in their children's education. The problem with the way in which the committee amended the bill at stage 2 is that parents of children at publicly funded nursery schools, which are only one form of pre-school education, would be treated differently.

Obviously, in some local authority areas, large numbers of pupils are in school nursery classes, and I assume that their parents will be able to get involved in the parent forum for that school. We also have publicly funded nursery schools that disperse children to a number of primary schools and, in rural areas in particular, agreements are in place with the private and voluntary sectors for the delivery of pre-school provision. Amendment 27 will not encourage the parents of pupils in publicly funded nursery schools to become involved in the same way as other parents will be involved.

It is difficult to find a form of words that encompasses the parents of pupils in all the different forms of pre-school education, but the solution that the ministers have gone for is the most appropriate one.

Robert Brown: I have listened with some care to the points that have been made in the debate. With great respect, the approach that has been taken was a little superficial, as it does not recognise the breadth of vision that is contained in the bill, the guidance that I spoke about earlier and the surrounding framework of educational structures.

I will make three points in reply to the debate. First, as Elaine Murray rightly mentioned, there is a relative narrowness in the definition that was used in the committee's original stage 2 amendment and in the amendment that Fiona Hyslop lodged for debate today. In the Executive amendments in the group, the situation is dealt with on a wider and more sophisticated basis.

Secondly, the Executive bows to no one in its support for early years education and input. We have done more than any Government before us to advance the cause of provision for early years education, which is at the heart of the approach that we are taking.

Fiona Hyslop: If that is so, why did the bill as introduced make no mention of nurseries?

Robert Brown: The bill takes a structural approach and its objective is parental involvement. I have made it clear that, as part of the guidance that will be associated with the bill, a toolkit for effective, practical and non-bureaucratic involvement with nurseries and other pre-school providers will have prominence.

I accept the point that was made about three to 18 structures.

Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind): If the Executive's amendments are not agreed to, what sanctions will the Executive be able to deploy against parents who do not become involved when their children are at the pre-school stage?

Robert Brown: It is not a question of sanctions; it is a question of there being a much more positive and dynamic approach to encouraging, enthusing and supporting parents in their involvement in the education of their children.

That brings me to an important point. We heard no detail about how the supporters of Fiona Hyslop's amendment 27 and the people who supported amendment 47 at stage 2 think that placing the suggested duty on the Scottish Executive or on local authorities will make a difference and add value to how parental involvement is talked about and operated in a way that goes beyond the Executive's proposed

approach. Amendment 27 would merely tinker with the arrangements and misses the point about the centrality of involvement in early years education in the bill and the proposed guidance.

I do not want to lose sight of the consensual point. Members of all parties are concerned about the matter and accept the importance of links between primary schools in particular and the early years sector. The important point is how those links are made through an approach that is as non-bureaucratic as possible and which recognises the varied provision in the pre-school sector and addresses that effectively in a way that adds value to the overall position. We should not lose sight of those points in this slightly party-political debate. In that context I sustain the position I set out in my opening remarks and ask members to support amendment 7 and to disagree to amendment 27.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The question is, that amendment 7 be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There will be a division. As this is the first division, there will be a five-minute suspension.

14:52

Meeting suspended.

14:57

On resuming—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We will now proceed with the division.

FOR

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)
Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
Gordon, Mr Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
Home Robertson, John (East Lothian) (Lab)
Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)

Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
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)
MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
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)
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)
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)
Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)

AGAINST

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
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)
Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
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)
Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)

McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Petrie, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Watt, Ms Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 68, Against 38, Abstentions 0.

Amendment 7 agreed to.

Amendment 8 moved—[Robert Brown].

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The question is, that amendment 8 be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

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)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Gordon, Mr Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 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)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)

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)
 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)
 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)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)

AGAINST

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 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)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 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)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Petrie, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Watt, Ms Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 68, Against 38, Abstentions 0.

Amendment 8 agreed to.

Amendment 27 moved—[Fiona Hyslop].

15:00

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The question is, that amendment 27, in the name of Fiona Hyslop, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 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)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 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)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Petrie, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Watt, Ms Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

AGAINST

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)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)

Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Gordon, Mr Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 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)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 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)
 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)
 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)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 38, Against 68, Abstentions 0.

Amendment 27 disagreed to.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Group 2 is on a national parents forum. Amendment 1, in the name of Fiona Hyslop, is the only amendment in the group.

Fiona Hyslop: Amendment 1 is fairly straightforward. It recognises that there will be a national parents forum to represent the views of parents, and it proposes that it should be the duty of ministers to consult that forum. Section 1 is a

high-level, strategic element of the bill and sets out the duties of ministers. It is the appropriate place to recognise that there will be a national parents forum. When a similar amendment was lodged at stage 2, the Education Committee was split 4:4, and the convener's casting vote led to its being disagreed to. I hope that the Executive has had time to reflect on the appropriateness of recognising that there will be a national parents forum and that it is willing to support the amendment.

When the committee took evidence at stage 1, it was struck by the need for a national body. I pay tribute to the work of the Scottish Parent Teacher Council and the Scottish School Board Association, which have represented the views of parents very well and have been influential in the progress of the bill, adding their opinion about what would be appropriate.

We do not want to be prescriptive about the bill, nor do we want the minister to have a statutory responsibility for establishing a national parents forum. Since the Charities and Trustee Investment (Scotland) Act 2005 was passed, we have had to be increasingly careful about the bodies that ministers establish under the law. In this case, were the ministers to establish a national representative body for parents, that body would not necessarily attract charitable status. A national parent organisation such as the Scottish Parent Teacher Council can raise charitable funds without being taxed in a way that affects the organisation adversely. That is one of the reasons why we agree with the minister. The national parents forum should not be established by the ministers. However, if the bill stipulates that ministers should consult any national body that is established at the grass roots by the parent forums and parent councils, that would be one way of ensuring that such a national body is recognised.

The Parliament could send the signal that it is in favour of such a national body being representative of grass-roots organisations in schools and communities throughout Scotland. That would also be a signal that we do not want to follow the Scottish Consumer Council's model, which would provide for an Ofcom for parents. Amendment 1 is simple; in that spirit, I hope that the Executive has had more time to consider the issue and that it will be able to support the amendment.

I move amendment 1.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Amendment 1 creates a duty on Scottish ministers to consult a national parents organisation as part of their actions to promote parental involvement. That is very much in keeping with the Conservatives' view that parents and their representatives should have a substantial input to the system. We believe that

parents, not the Government, should shape the way in which the system works. The amendment is therefore worthy of our support.

Iain Smith (North East Fife) (LD): As Fiona Hyslop mentioned, there was no majority in favour of the proposal in amendment 1 when it came before the Education Committee at stage 2. Therefore, I exercised a casting vote in the time-honoured way in which a convener should. It is not necessary to have in the bill the provisions contained in amendment 1. I cannot envisage any circumstance in which an education minister would not consult a national body that was set up by parent forums or parent councils. However, there is a danger that, if we put a duty to do so in the bill, that could allow ministers to claim that they had discharged their duty to consult parents simply by consulting the national body.

We should not be prescriptive about the sort of body parents that may wish to set up, as they may not wish to set up a national body or may wish to set up regional bodies. However, if we were to agree to amendment 1, we might be prescribing to parents how they should set up representative bodies for themselves.

Amendment 1 is not necessary and may be unhelpful at this stage.

Mr Ingram: In the stage 2 debate on a similar amendment, the minister accepted the need to establish

"a strong national body to represent parents' interests".—
[*Official Report, Education Committee, Wednesday 29 March 2006; c 3121.*]

He also accepted that such a body would be a key consultee on education matters, but denied that making such provision in the bill would add anything.

The minister also asked why the body should be singled out as a consultee above trade union and other interests. It seems fairly obvious to me why the bill should mention a national parents body. After all, it is a parental involvement bill. It aims to widen and deepen parental involvement in schools and in the development of education policy, so it is entirely appropriate that special mention should be made of the role of a national parents body. Indeed, the failure to make such a reference would surely be a serious omission from the bill—in some eyes, it would be a fundamental flaw.

I urge Parliament to agree to amendment 1.

Dr Murray: Although I agree that it is essential that ministers consult any national parents body, the new subsection that amendment 1 proposes could have an unintended consequence. Would every bill that went through the Parliament in future need to specify who would have to be consulted? If so, would ministers need to bother to

consult any agency other than those that were specified in statute?

Robert Brown: I agree entirely with the comments that Iain Smith and Elaine Murray made; they hit the nail right on the head. There is no argument about the fact that ministers consult, and will continue to consult, national parents organisations—and, indeed, many other bodies—in connection with education issues.

A statutory duty is a significant matter, and when we legislate, we should be careful to ensure that additional duties add value to what we are trying to enshrine in legislation. The Executive has made it clear that it is fully supportive of the principle of establishing a strong national body, but it is not up to us to determine the format of that body. The body must be led by local parents, in that it must emanate from parents groups throughout Scotland and build on the foundation that has been laid by the existing national bodies.

However, that is different from saying that there should be a statutory duty on ministers to consult such a body. The issue is what would happen if there was no such statutory duty, and the reality is that consultation would take place. Therefore, amendment 1 would add nothing to the way in which consultation will operate. We are arguing about nothing of substance. The central point is that we envisage that, once the bill has been passed and the implementation arrangements have begun, a new national body will emerge. That body will be parent led, not led by the Executive, and ministers will consult the body, as has always been the practice.

On Lord James Douglas-Hamilton's comments, it is worth noting that the legislation that set up school boards does not contain any such obligation. Lord James might even have been involved in that legislation as a minister, so there is a dichotomy in the arguments that he advances. It has not been the normal arrangement to have such details in bills, although I accept that there are exceptions.

I ask the Parliament to reject Fiona Hyslop's amendment 1.

Fiona Hyslop: I ask the minister to read the amendment, which refers to

"any national parents' organisation established by Parent Forums or Parent Councils".

That is precisely because we want the organisation to be led by people at the grass roots. Perhaps one of the reasons why the Scottish School Board Association has not been able to exercise the powers that it could have exercised is that they were not originally legislated for. The minister's arguments are defeated in that regard.

At stage 1, we identified that one of the biggest holes in the bill was the lack of a reference to a national body for parents. I suspect that the only reason why that cannot be included in the bill is that to do so would mean that the body would not attract charitable status. That is an anomaly, which deserves recognition. It is important that ministers have duties and responsibilities to consult parents under a parental involvement bill.

In response to Elaine Murray, I point out that we pass legislation all the time that says which organisations ministers have a duty to consult. Jim Wallace made such a proposal in the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Bill, specifically saying that students should be consulted on the introduction of variable fees. Yet, having consulted students, the Executive will tomorrow propose legislation to introduce variable top-up fees in Scotland. I am sorry to say that, despite such a provision to consult, the Executive has disregarded the views of students.

The principle is the same, however. In other pieces of legislation, there are duties on ministers to consult different organisations. The effect of amendment 1 is simply that it would recognise the importance of a national body for parents, which is what parents told us they need.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh): The question is, that amendment 1 be agreed to. Are we all agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 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)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 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)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)

Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Petrie, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Watt, Ms Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

AGAINST

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)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marilyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gordon, Mr Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 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)
 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)
 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)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)

Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 36, Against 62, Abstentions 0.

Amendment 1 disagreed to.

Section 2—Strategies for parental involvement

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Group 3 is on equal opportunities, barriers to parental involvement etc. Amendment 9, in the name of the minister, is grouped with amendments 2, 17 and 24.

Robert Brown: At stage 2, Frank McAveety and Ken Macintosh both lodged amendments that were designed to demonstrate the Parliament's commitment to equal opportunities in the bill. The Executive is fully committed to the promotion of equal opportunities in our schools, and I undertook to consider further how that could be brought into the bill more effectively. Of course, there is also a wider framework of existing equal opportunities legislation. Amendments 9, 17 and 24 are the result of those considerations.

We have picked up Frank McAveety's proposal and the wording of amendment 9 says that the education authority's strategy for parental involvement should

"have regard to how that strategy will promote equal opportunities."

Section 2 seems the most logical and effective place for that duty and it is helpful to make explicit what is already implicit in other equal opportunities legislation.

Amendment 17 ensures that the head teacher's annual report to the parent council has regard to "equal opportunity requirements", which will allow the parent council to know how those are being worked out at a practical, local level in their school without making an undue bureaucratic imposition on the local authority.

Amendment 24 defines the terms "equal opportunities" and "equal opportunity requirements" with reference to their meaning in the Scotland Act 1998.

15:15

In amendment 2, Fiona Hyslop raises important issues—the factors that may discourage parents from becoming involved in their children's education and school—about which we had an interesting exchange at stage 2. We know that there is a variety of reasons why some parents find involvement difficult. Their own experience of school might have been negative and might have undermined their confidence in engaging with a school. Some parents' first language is not English

and home-school communications issues might arise from that and other matters. Some families might experience practical difficulties with domestic or care arrangements.

For those and other reasons, I accept that education authorities and schools must take a strategic approach to involving parents in their children's education and learning. The bill fully allows for that. Sections 1 and 2 place appropriate duties on education authorities actively to promote parental involvement in its widest sense and to have a strategy in place to develop parental involvement.

In practical terms, education authorities will in the process of meeting their duties pick up on and take account of the factors to which Fiona Hyslop's amendment refers, in a way that it is hoped will encourage parental involvement. There is no need to headline that in the bill as amendment 2 would. A minor point is that the amendment's wording might be seen as a little negative and contrary to the bill's positive approach to encouraging parental involvement.

As I have said, amendment 9 requires education authorities to have regard to how their strategies for parental involvement will promote equal opportunities. That is the alternative way forward. We also amended the bill at stage 2 to require ministers to issue guidance on education authorities' strategies for parental involvement. We will ensure that that guidance addresses the need for strategies to take account of all the factors, including those to which Fiona Hyslop's amendment refers, that discourage or inhibit parental involvement. They will include factors that arise from disadvantage or inequality.

We have the proper structure to take forward and I hope that Fiona Hyslop accepts the reality of that. Therefore, I ask members to support amendments 9, 17 and 24 and to resist amendment 2.

I move amendment 9.

Fiona Hyslop: The group of amendments highlights the fact that the bill is about two issues: the representative forum for school management support and parents' involvement in their children's education. Barriers to involvement apply to both elements. The SNP supports the amendments on equal opportunities. Perhaps amendment 2 is an attempt to broaden that out and to recognise that, for inclusiveness, we must address equal opportunities in individual children's education as well as in representation.

It is clear that we must ensure that education authorities not only make sure that parent councils are established but are far more actively involved in identifying the barriers to parental involvement. Those barriers will change and will be different in

rural areas, urban areas, city centres and other parts of Scotland with different experiences. For example, the increase in Polish migrants to the Inverness area will pose key challenges for the local council and education authority.

Children in Scotland supports amendment 2 and thinks that it would be a useful addition to the bill. The amendment would prevent councils from just ticking a box to say that a parent council has been established and would give them an active role in identifying the factors that discourage parental involvement. The amendment has a broader scope than the equal opportunities provisions, although they are not mutually exclusive. The amendment would be a useful addition that underpins the fact that there is more to the bill than the mechanistic establishment of parent councils to replace school boards.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: We support all the amendments in the group, particularly Fiona Hyslop's amendment 2, which would place a duty on education authorities to identify the factors that discourage parental involvement. That amendment is to be welcomed, as identifying areas for improvement would inform and focus an education authority's approach to improving the situation and should lead to more effective and measurable progress.

Mr Kenneth Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): As the minister said, I was keen at stage 2 to make an amendment that would place a duty on education authorities to monitor the representation of parents on parent councils. That amendment was designed to encourage positive action to promote the involvement of parents from minority ethnic communities in representative bodies.

As Fiona Hyslop's amendment 2 recognises, a number of obstacles can work against the representation of parents from particular backgrounds on school boards and, in future, on school councils. It is easy to imagine how such councils could become dominated by white, middle-class parents and, potentially, even work against the interests of the more vulnerable pupils in our schools and their families. I am pleased that the Executive and the minister have recognised that and have agreed with the principle behind my amendment and, indeed, the principle behind Fiona Hyslop's amendment.

I accept the Executive's argument that the bill should not be overly prescriptive or descriptive but should promote a general duty to have regard to the promotion of equal opportunities in preparing a strategy for parental involvement. Amendment 17 places a further duty on head teachers to report progress on those matters. We will come to that issue later.

As the minister suggested, Fiona Hyslop's amendment 2 puts in rather negative language the idea of promoting parental involvement, which lies at the heart of the bill but in positive terms. The amendment is well meant, but I urge members not to support it. I also urge members to vote for amendment 9.

Robert Brown: The issue has been fully debated, but I want to say one thing in response to what has been said. Nothing could be further from the truth than Fiona Hyslop's comment about

"the mechanistic establishment of parent councils".

That idea comes from reading sections on setting up the system without having proper regard to the strategy, which is a key part of the bill. That strategy will give life, structure, innovation and dynamism to our important objectives.

I am sure that all members think that the aim of widening parental involvement is central to the bill. The divide on the issue that we are discussing should not disguise that unanimity. As a result of trying to cover all eventualities, we would run the risk of bringing the law of unintended consequences into effect. It is far better to speak about such matters in more general terms. The direction of travel has been clearly set out, guidance will deal with the details and the end result should take on board all the issues that members throughout the chamber are concerned about.

I ask members to disagree to amendment 2.

Amendment 9 agreed to.

Amendment 2 moved—[Fiona Hyslop].

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The question is, that amendment 2 be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
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)
Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
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)
Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (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)
McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
Petrie, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

AGAINST

Arbuckle, Mr Andrew (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
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)
Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
Glen, Marilyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
Home Robertson, John (East Lothian) (Lab)
Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (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)
MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (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)
Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)

Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 33, Against 58, Abstentions 0.

Amendment 2 disagreed to.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Group 4 is on the specific nature of parental involvement. Amendment 3, in the name of Fiona Hyslop, is grouped with amendments 4, 5 and 6.

Fiona Hyslop: This group of amendments hinges on one argument—that the legislation must emphasise that it is not just about the representation of parents on something that replaces school boards. Many of us have been quite sceptical about the bill and if it is to mean anything, it must encourage the promotion of parental involvement in a child's education.

Amendments 3, 4, 5 and 6 would make it explicit to anybody who was reading the bill or executing it through council strategies that it is about promoting parents' involvement in their children's education as well as in the school generally.

Although it is clear that the council has a duty under section 1(2) to promote parents' involvement in the education that a school provides "to that pupil" and "to its pupils generally", that is not referred to again after section 1. It is important to encourage councils to ensure that, in any strategy that they put forward, parental involvement is about involvement in the children's education individually as well as in the structural, mechanistic—I will use the word "mechanistic"—establishment of a parent council.

The vote that took place right at the beginning of the debate, about early years education, reinforces my point. Some of the arguments that were put against the SNP's trying to promote early years education as being covered by the bill were concerns about how parents would involve themselves in the parent forum. That could not be further from the point at argument. The point at argument in relation to early years education is that, if we can encourage parents to become involved and support their children's education in the earliest years, they are more likely to stay involved. That is a test of where the Government is coming from on this. We must reinforce the point that the bill is about not just replacing school boards but parental involvement in education. We must ensure that that is explicit in other parts of the bill, not just in section 1.

I have agreed that much of the regulation should be in guidance, rather than in the bill. There has been good will from members around the chamber to allow the Executive to keep the bill free from too many cumbersome additions. However, there are

certain principles that must be embedded in the bill if it is to work. It is in that spirit that these amendments have been lodged.

I move amendment 3.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: We support Fiona Hyslop's amendments. We have argued consistently that it is crucial to support parents in getting involved in their children's education, helping with homework and providing encouragement. We believe that that is just as important as encouraging parents to get involved in the community life and governance of the school. The amendments in the group would help to ensure that the bill's provisions encourage parental involvement for the purpose of securing greater educational attainment by pupils and so are worthy of our support.

Iain Smith: The long title of the bill begins:

"An Act of the Scottish Parliament to make further provision for the involvement of parents in their children's education and in school education generally".

I do not think that it is necessary to spell that out in full every time that the word "involvement" appears. We should ensure that legislation is kept simple, and the wording of the long title makes it perfectly clear what the bill means by "involvement".

Dr Murray: Section 1 states:

"It is the duty of an education authority to promote the involvement of the parents ... in the education provided ... to that pupil".

All that Fiona Hyslop's amendments would do is to add cumbersome phraseology; they would not add to the spirit of the bill in any way.

Ms Rosemary Byrne (South of Scotland) (SSP): I support Fiona Hyslop's amendments. It is important to have the proposed wording in the bill. We do not want this parental involvement bill to end up being a bill that is about parents going into schools, helping out where they can and doing fundraising—we want it to be about much more than that. Having the suggested emphasis in the bill is important. We want parents to take a real interest in their children's education, to be encouraged to do so and not to feel intimidated when they go into a school and ask how it teaches maths or does this or that. Indeed, we want to encourage parents to learn how to do homework with their children and all the other things that are important in education.

Margo MacDonald: Although I have the greatest respect for Rosemary Byrne, I think that her good intentions have overtaken her good judgment on this. We should be trying to make any bills that the Parliament passes as simple to read as possible. They should be in very clear English. Well-intentioned though Fiona Hyslop's

amendments may be, they would not make anything in the bill clearer and certainly would not improve the role of parents in schools.

15:30

Robert Brown: Margo MacDonald is an experienced legislator and her response had it in one. The principal sections of the bill—sections 1 and 2—contain very powerful words. As is the case with many other bills, sections 1 and 2 are the principal sections and they state the position very precisely. Section 1(2) makes it clear that

“It is the duty of an education authority to promote the involvement of the parents of a pupil ... to that pupil, and ... to its pupils generally.”

Those are very specific and powerful words.

Notwithstanding Fiona Hyslop's attempts to amend it, section 2 specifically refers to the strategy for dealing with the duties under section 1, including the bit to which I have referred already. Quite simply, amendments 3, 4, 5 and 6 are unnecessary. They repeat what has already been provided for in the bill and, to be quite honest, I am a little bit disappointed that the amendments have come back today because we explained clearly at stage 2 that the strategy must cover such things. To take Fiona Hyslop's point, although people will not read the bill as a routine bedtime exercise, it is important that it be elegant and simple. If it is cluttered up with phrases such as those in the amendments, which add nothing of value, we will not make any advances. Amendments 5 and 6 relate to school development and the advice and information that head teachers and staff have to give to parent councils and are unnecessary because sections 1 and 2 provide for the overarching requirement to involve parents in their child's education and in the general education that is provided at the school.

Parliament should resist amendments 3, 4, 5 and 6 on the principle that we should not add to the complexity of legislation if that is not necessary.

Fiona Hyslop: The amendments are hardly complex; they are fairly easy to read. If Parliament rejects them, it rejects parental involvement in children's education, in the council strategy, in the school development plan and in discussion among teachers, head teachers and parents on attitudes towards education. They are specific and practical measures for spelling out that the bill is not just about parental involvement and representation on school boards; it is about the meat and drink of education, which is the learning experience. We are trying to embed the learning experience in the legislation. The approach is fairly simple and straightforward and I press amendment 3.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The question is, that amendment 3 be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
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)
Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
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)
Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (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)
McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
Petrie, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)
Watt, Ms Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

AGAINST

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)
Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
Gordon, Mr Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)

Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 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)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McMahan, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 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)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 39, Against 65, Abstentions 0.

Amendment 3 disagreed to.

Amendment 4 not moved.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Group 5 is on minor and consequential amendments, Amendment 10, in the name of the minister, is grouped with amendments 11, 18, 21, 22, 23, 25 and 26.

Robert Brown: As you said, Presiding Officer, all the amendments in the group are technical or consequential. Most of them arise out of amendments accepted at stage 2. Those relating to section 18 reflect further consideration of commencement issues.

Amendment 10 makes it clear that, consistent with other provisions in the bill, the duty on education authorities to have regard to the views of pupils in attendance at schools in their area applies only to those pupils in attendance at public

schools rather than all schools. Amendment 11 brings the wording of the provision in section 6(7)(a)(iia) into line with similar provisions elsewhere in the bill. Amendment 18 seeks to deal with the provision in section 6(7)(a)(iia)—that a parent council should intimate the fact of its establishment to the pupils in attendance.

Amendment 21 ensures that the bill is structured so as to reflect the intended repeal of different parts of the School Boards (Scotland) Act 1988 at different times. Amendment 22 is similar but refers to the termination of the appointment of a clerk to a school board once the school board ceases to exist. Amendment 23 provides that, unless the context otherwise requires, expressions in the bill have the same meaning as in section 135 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980. The amendment broadens the current wording to include the definition of “primary school”. Amendment 25 repeals section 74 of the Self-Governing Schools etc (Scotland) Act 1989, which provided for requirements, under section 87A of the 1980 act, to advertise principal teacher posts and, under section 87B of the 1980 act, relating to the selection of teachers. Amendment 26 repeals section 50 of the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003.

Essentially, the amendments will tidy up the statute book.

I move amendment 10.

Amendment 10 agreed to.

Section 3—Ambitions and objectives for a school

Amendment 5 not moved.

Section 6—Scheme for establishment of a Parent Council

Amendments 11 and 12 moved—[Robert Brown]—and agreed to.

Section 7—Restrictions as to composition of a Parent Council

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Group 6 is on the chair of a parent council. Amendment 13, in the name of the minister, is grouped with amendment 20.

Robert Brown: When Fiona Hyslop at stage 2 moved an amendment similar to amendment 13, I said that I was attracted to it but wanted time to consider whether wider issues needed to be taken into account, such as what would happen if the child of the chair left the school during the course of the term. Amendment 13 highlights the importance of ensuring that the lead officers of the parent council have an active and close relationship with members of the parent forum.

The amendment ensures that only a person who is the parent of a child at the school can chair the school's parent council. I am sure that that is right and that Fiona Hyslop's stage 2 amendment was entirely correct.

Amendment 20 provides similar provisions for combined parent councils and brings those into line with those for single parent councils. Obviously, a parent council needs to keep in touch with parents.

I move amendment 13.

Fiona Hyslop: I put on record our support for those parents who have chaired school boards and parent-teacher councils in the past. They served their children and the community well and we should recognise that fact.

I should be grateful for small mercies, given that members seem to have voted against all my other amendments today. I am pleased that the Executive listened to the arguments that I made at stage 2 and lodged an amendment similar to the one that I previously proposed. We should recall that the reason for such a provision is that, despite the good will and good efforts of all involved, circumstances may arise in which co-opted members who are parents of former pupils might overstay their welcome by continuing to chair the parent council. It is important that we keep parent councils live and fresh by requiring that only parents whose children attend the school can be given the responsibility of chairing the parent council. I am pleased that the Executive has acknowledged that by lodging amendment 13.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I will allow a brief contribution from James Douglas-Hamilton.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: In one sentence, the minister's response to Fiona Hyslop's stage 2 amendment will ensure that parental representation remains strong.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Does the minister require to sum up?

Robert Brown: No.

Amendment 13 agreed to.

Section 8—Functions of a Parent Council

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Group 7 is on the functions of a parent council. Amendment 28, in the name of James Douglas-Hamilton, is grouped with amendments 32 and 29.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Amendment 28 is supported by the Scottish School Board Association. The purpose of the amendment is to clarify that parent councils are to have regular contact with teachers at the school, in the interests of promoting parental involvement. The parent

council should promote contact between management, teachers, parents, pupils and the local community for the benefit of children's well-being and attainment.

I will also support amendment 32, in the name of Phil Gallie, which is based on the existing provision in section 9(2) of the School Boards (Scotland) Act 1988 that gives boards the right to approve spending on teaching materials. Amendment 32 would make that provision more specific, in that it would apply to materials relating to sex and relationships education. The amendment would therefore give parents appropriate influence over of how such a sensitive subject is taught to their children.

Amendment 29, in the name of Fiona Hyslop, is also worthy of support. Its purpose is to augment the quality of parental involvement by giving parent councils the right to make representations on any appropriate matter to the local authority and other public bodies, not including the police, the fire service, the health board or Scottish Enterprise. The amendment would help to keep the school a central part of the community.

I move amendment 28.

Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con): In last week's debate on human rights, a new word was mentioned in the chamber—responsibility. There was particular emphasis on the responsibility of parents for their children. I recognise that the state also has a responsibility to our children. The state protects children in health and sexual matters by setting in statute 16 as the age of consent.

I believe that the bill should leave parents with the responsibilities that they currently have under the School Boards (Scotland) Act 1988, which it effectively replaces. Amendment 32 in my name upholds the right of parents to determine what material is fit for production in respect of sex education and education on drugs for their children in schools.

In advancing my argument for giving parents a say, I draw members' attention to the national health guidelines for teaching in schools. I point to the page that determines the guidelines for those in the 11-to-14 age bracket. I will not read out all the items, as that would be offensive, but I will give members a taste. The document refers to

"Use of sexual toys eg vibrators or other items ... Sadism and/or masochism—the use of pain ... Dressing up—tying up ... Multiple partner at one time—ie more than 2 people".

I suggest that it is wrong to put those matters before children who are aged between 11 and 14. However, that is not for me to judge—I believe that it is for every parent to judge. The amendment that I have lodged would allow parents to have a say. I recommend that all members should examine the national guidelines. I believe that they are

inappropriate and that parents have a right to judge. I ask members to support amendment 32.

Fiona Hyslop: Amendment 29 is in line with the position that was adopted by the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities at stage 1. This is the first time that we have had an opportunity to debate, to legislate on and to vote on the matter. The aim of the amendment is to ensure that the role of parent councils is not restricted to the life and circumstances of the school but relates to wider community planning and strategic issues, such as transport and the school's surrounding environment. If we believe that schools should be at the heart of the community, we should agree with COSLA and support the amendment, to ensure that schools can contribute and be consulted on issues that touch on them.

I support amendment 28, in the name of Lord James Douglas-Hamilton. Unless we vote for the amendment, there will be no mention of teachers in the bill. There is an acknowledgement of the role of head teachers and parents, but teachers and their connection with pupils should also be supported.

I think that, with amendment 32, Phil Gallie is hijacking the bill. The amendment is a very late contribution and is misplaced. If he had paid any attention to the contributions that have been made by parents organisations and by the Education Committee, he would know that the matters to which the amendment refers will be part and parcel of consultation on and discussion of parental involvement in the very educational issues about which I have argued all afternoon. The framework of the legislation allows for that.

Why do I think that Phil Gallie is wrong? His arguments are misplaced in a number of respects. He says that amendment 32 replicates the provisions of the 1988 act. If he had looked at that act, he would know that it does not. Lord James Douglas-Hamilton was also incorrect in saying that. The 1988 act gives schools boards authority over spending. Amendment 32 is not about spending, but about approval. Phil Gallie says that it is about ensuring that parents have a say, but in fact it is about ensuring that they have a veto. Why should it end with sex and drugs? Why should the amendment not extend to religion? It could be a charter for establishing creationist schools. If a member comes late to a piece of legislation, they should think through the content and technical details of the amendment that they lodge, rather than going for headlines and seeking to hijack the bill. Some of us have taken a lot of time and put in a lot of effort to ensure that parents have meaningful involvement in their children's education. On that basis, I will support amendments 29 and 28 but reject amendment 32.

15:45

Iain Smith: I will concentrate on amendment 32, which I urge members to reject.

In Scottish legislation, we already have sufficient provision to ensure that parents are adequately consulted on matters of this nature. The Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Act 2000 made that a requirement and the national guidance that was issued on sex education in schools specifically says that parents should be consulted on these matters. It is absolutely right that that should happen, but it is absolutely wrong that parents should have a veto, whether collectively or through a small group that might take over a school board in order to push its agenda. That would not be an acceptable way forward.

In particular, the approach that is suggested would be wrong because it ignores the issue of who education is for. The education that we are talking about delivering is not for the parents; it is for the children. It is supposed to ensure that children can make informed choices, subject to their being the appropriate age, based on educational materials that are appropriate to their level of understanding. The idea that children should be denied appropriate educational materials because a small minority of parents think that they should not have access to them is dangerous and will put at risk many children who are not at risk at present. We have sensible provisions for dealing with these matters and we do not want to bring in rules that are not sensible and that would allow a small minority of parents to veto the important sex and drugs education programmes that are available to our children in our schools.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I also want to speak briefly on amendment 32. The position that we have heard from the Conservatives today, which is that parents should be given the power of control over material relating to sexual health and drugs education, is familiar. However, although I am not surprised that it has been raised, I am quite astonished at the fact that the amendment is as blunt as it is. If Phil Gallie were to propose that parent councils should ascertain the views of the parents, under section 8(e), or promote contact and communication on these issues, that would be fine—discussion of these issues would be positive. However, the simple veto that is included in the amendment, without caveats, constraints or controls, is another matter entirely.

Phil Gallie talked about human rights, yet there is nothing in the amendment that would prevent the infringement of the human rights of young people to their education. Further, he does himself no favours by proposing the amendment in a speech that implied that wildly inappropriate material is circulating freely in schools. That is

simply not the case. If Mr Gallie has an opportunity to respond to what has been said about the amendment, I would like him to say whether there is anything in the amendment that would prevent it from being used as a charter for the worst kind of keep-the-clause bigotry.

Mr Ingram: I, too, oppose the amendment in the name of Phil Gallie, which appears to be nothing more than an opportunistic attempt to create some lurid tabloid headlines—a kind of revisiting of the section 2A debate. Mr Gallie appears to imply that, if left to their own devices, teachers will peddle inappropriate sex and drugs propaganda to our children. Such notions do not deserve to be given any house room. Promoting moral and healthy behaviour will naturally be something that schools and parent councils will be anxious to get right and they should be left to get on with it without interference from would-be moral majoritarians. I trust that the Parliament will knock this nasty little amendment on its head.

Robert Brown: I recognise the point behind amendment 28, in the name of Lord James Douglas-Hamilton, which is to do with the importance of contact between parents and the managers and teachers of a school. However, once again, the amendment is unnecessary. As section 8 sets out the whole range of players with whom a parent council should promote contact, it is unnecessary for the bill to refer expressly to the school's management or teachers in that regard. The bill enables the parent council to promote contact with parents, the head teacher and his or her staff, pupils and others with an interest in school education. That process will be led by the parent council and, indeed, will prove important to its effective functioning. As a result, the bill's present reference to "the school" is appropriate and proportionate, and amendment 28 adds nothing to the provisions.

Much has been said about the amendment in the name of Phil Gallie, which Adam Ingram rightly characterised as "this nasty little amendment". Mr Ingram is not the sort of chap who gets terribly excited during debates, but he certainly got carried away with his references to lurid headlines. He hit the nail right on the head. I believe that giving parent councils the function of approving materials used by the school to promote education in sexual health, drugs or any other area, which is what Phil Gallie seeks to do, is not something that most parents want. Indeed, consultation on the bill showed that very few parents wanted control over a school's spending or teaching materials, although they wanted to be consulted where appropriate.

It is quite disingenuous of Mr Gallie to say that amendment 32 simply follows the wording of provisions in the School Boards (Scotland) Act

1988. As other members have pointed out, that is simply not the case. Furthermore, like Patrick Harvie, I totally refute the notion that wildly inappropriate materials are circulating in our schools and corrupting our children's morals.

Accepting amendment 32 would lead to the introduction of inappropriate and unwanted procedures for approving educational materials and would cause confusion over whether the head teacher or the parent council had the final say on the use of materials. Indeed, it might seriously complicate the work of schools, particularly secondary schools, where sex education and associated issues are taught right across the curriculum in, for example, biology, personal and social education and religious and moral education.

As Iain Smith and other members have made clear, parents and carers already have a means of making their views known. In developing and revising their health education programmes, local authorities and schools are expected to consult parents, carers and the wider community. Moreover, schools are expected to work in partnership with parents and put in place arrangements to allow parents to raise concerns. Although most parents or carers are happy to let their child take part in the school's sex education programme, in some exceptional cases a parent or carer might prefer to deal with that aspect of their child's education at home. That is their human right. However, it is not right to impose that view on everyone else. I should also point out that the child's views must also be taken into account in reaching any decision.

Parents have other means of raising their concerns on matters such as sexual health or drugs education materials. For example, the parent council itself can raise such matters with the head teacher and the education authority and, if it is not content with the response, with Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education.

I echo the concerns that Fiona Hyslop expressed in her excellent contribution about members attempting to introduce such substantial—and, to some extent, irrelevant—amendments at stage 3. Such actions are a total denial of the Parliament's consultative processes. If Phil Gallie had truly been serious about influencing the bill, he would have lodged an amendment at stage 2 for proper consideration by the committee. Amendment 32 suggests that there is a problem where none exists—

David McLetchie (Edinburgh Pentlands)
(Con): If the minister feels that it is inappropriate to introduce a whole raft of new material at stage 3, he must also feel that it was inappropriate for the Scottish Executive to import the provisions on landlord registration in exactly the same way.

Robert Brown: I am talking about the committee consideration of this bill. As I have said, with amendment 32, Phil Gallie seeks to suggest that there is a problem in this matter. However, no such problem exists or provision to deal with it has been worked through. As provision that suits all parents' needs has indeed been made, the Parliament should not agree to this nasty little amendment.

On amendment 29, in the name of Fiona Hyslop, I acknowledge that there are certain non-educational issues in which parents may have an interest and on which they must have the opportunity to make their voice heard. However, as I have pointed out, a parent council can report parents' concerns on any issue to the head teacher, the education authority or anyone else whom the council considers appropriate. I feel that amendment 29 affects the central position of education in the legislation. Although people can raise other issues through the parent council, the council's primary purpose is to deal with educational issues. As a result, there is no need for the bill to highlight representation on non-educational matters any more than it does already.

Fiona Hyslop: Amendment 32 has caused us to bypass other subjects but, on amendment 29 specifically, how would a parent council make representation on child protection issues to, for example, a health authority? Health authorities are not mentioned in the bill. Would the parent council have to do that via the local authority? If amendment 29 were accepted, the parent council could make direct representation to the relevant authority.

Robert Brown: That does not need to go in the bill in the way that amendment 29 suggests. Section 8(1)(a) and section 8(2)(c), in particular, give the parent council the ability to make representations to whomsoever it chooses. Things can work extremely well without having to be spelled out as in amendment 29.

The bill has the balance right on the function of the parent council. I therefore urge members to resist amendments 28, 29 and 32.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I will be brief. The minister has been grossly unfair to my friend Phil Gallie. The minister is entirely incorrect. Section 9(1) of the School Boards (Scotland) Act 1988 says:

"Every education authority shall, in every financial year, make available to the headteacher of every school in their area such funds as they think necessary for the purchase of books and other teaching materials for the school, and for such other purposes as they think fit."

Section 9(2) says:

"The headteacher—

(a) shall from time to time make proposals to the School

Board as to how the funds provided under this section should be spent; and

(b) shall not spend funds on any proposal unless it is approved by the Board."

If the minister submits to this Parliament that the position is all right at present, I submit to him that that is because parents have been given powers and rights under the 1988 act. The minister is trying to sweep those powers and rights away. For that reason, we think that his opposition to Phil Gallie this afternoon and his comments on amendment 32 are unworthy of any minister of the Crown. The minister's comments should be rejected.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The question is, that amendment 28 be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There will be a division. Members who wish to support amendment 28 should press their yes buttons.

I say to Alex Neil that it is his request-to-speak button that he has pressed. [*Laughter.*]

For

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
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)
Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
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)
Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (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)
McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
Petrie, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)
Watt, Ms Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

AGAINST

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)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gordon, Mr Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 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)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 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)
 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)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)

ABSTENTIONS

Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 36, Against 65, Abstentions 1.

Amendment 28 disagreed to.

Amendment 32 moved—[Phil Gallie].

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The question is, that amendment 32 be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy 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)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Petrie, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)

AGAINST

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 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)
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 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)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)

Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, 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)
 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)
 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)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watt, Ms Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 14, Against 89, Abstentions 0.

Amendment 32 disagreed to.

Amendment 14 moved—[Robert Brown]—and agreed to.

Amendment 29 moved—[Fiona Hyslop].

16:00

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The question is, that amendment 29 be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 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)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 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)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (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)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Petrie, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)
 Watt, Ms Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

AGAINST

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)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gordon, Mr Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 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)

MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 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)
 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)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 39, Against 64, Abstentions 0.

Amendment 29 disagreed to.

Amendment 15 moved—[Robert Brown]—and agreed to.

Section 11—Duties of education authority to a Parent Council etc

Amendment 6 not moved.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Group 8 is on the duty of the head teacher to give advice to a parent council. Amendment 16, in the name of the minister, is the only amendment in the group.

Robert Brown: Although the debate on amendment 16, which seeks to amend section 11, will not be as exciting as the debate that we have just had on the amendments to section 8, section 11 is important. We have lodged amendment 16 to clarify the role that head teachers can play in offering advice to parent councils, a matter on which Dr Jean Turner prompted discussion at stage 2. I am glad that the committee allowed me to consider the matter further.

We want the head teacher and the parent council to work together closely. That is why the bill will place on head teachers a duty to attend, or to be represented at, council meetings. Head teachers will also have the right to attend those meetings. Such attendance will allow the head teacher to take part in council discussions and to

offer advice and information on what is being done at the school to promote parental involvement.

In response to a number of requests, amendment 16 seeks to extend that provision by requiring the head teacher to give advice on other matters that fall within their area of responsibility, including all aspects of the work of the school, such as matters that relate to the school curriculum and policies on uniform or discipline. If an issue fell outwith the head teacher's area of responsibility, the council would be able to raise it with the education authority. We want to avoid a conflict of interest in the giving of advice. The idea that the head teacher will act as an adviser to the parent council is important, so we are pleased to be able to respond to the proposal that Jean Turner made at stage 2.

I move amendment 16.

Dr Jean Turner (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind): I thank the minister for taking on board the essence of the amendment that I lodged at stage 2.

East Dunbartonshire Council's school board forum and its education and cultural services committee have been following the bill's progress closely. They thought that the bill would be enhanced if the proposal that the head teacher should be appointed as an adviser to the parent council were accepted. Amendment 16 will mean that parents can seek guidance, when that is appropriate. We may all have our own specialties, but we are not education specialists, so it will be good for parent councils to be able to receive advice from the head teacher. I thank the minister for taking on board that suggestion.

Fiona Hyslop: I supported Jean Turner at stage 2 and am pleased that the minister has responded positively to the suggestion that she made. That is a good example of responsiveness and of the ability of the Parliament's committees to ensure that, when we pass legislation, the views of people who work in the field are reflected in our legislation in a practical way.

Amendment 16 will allow the key educational role of head teachers to be recognised. They are not just managers of our schools, even though the increasing bureaucratic burden may make them feel as if that is what they are. Amendment 16 will help to reinforce the point that they are educational leaders by allowing them to act as advisers to parent councils.

Margo MacDonald: I am 100 per cent supportive of amendment 16, but can the minister enlighten me as to whether it will have a knock-on effect on the contract of employment for head teachers? Has any thought been given to that?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Dr Jean Turner is to be congratulated on lodging the original amendment to which the minister has responded today with amendment 16. The solution will undoubtedly consolidate the working relationship between parents, schools and local authorities. We are grateful to Dr Turner for highlighting an important issue.

Robert Brown: I say to Margo MacDonald that we have looked at the contract of employment for head teachers and I think that I am right in saying that the phraseology in the contract is fairly similar to that which we have put in the bill. When we looked at the matter previously, we took the view that a head teacher's general responsibilities would encompass that role as part of his or her normal duties. We continue to think that that is the case but, for the avoidance of doubt, we felt that it does no harm to put the measure in the bill.

We do so for the reason that Fiona Hyslop rightly said, which is that head teachers are not just managers but leaders. Increasingly, we are recognising the importance of school leadership in improving the standards of education in our schools. That is a central issue. It is important and proper for the important link between head teachers and parent councils to be expressly recognised in the bill. That is the background to our decision to respond favourably to the amendment in the name of Dr Jean Turner at stage 2.

Amendment 16 agreed to.

Section 13—Headteacher's report to Parent Council, Combined Parent Council or Parent Forum

Amendment 17 moved—[Robert Brown]—and agreed to.

Section 14—Procedures for appointment of headteacher or deputy and participation of a Parent Council

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): We move to group 9. Amendment 30, in the name of Lord James Douglas-Hamilton, is the only amendment in the group.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: In order to ensure that there is no diminution in the statutory rights of parents to participate in the appointment of senior staff, amendment 30 provides for parental representation and participation in the appointment of head teachers to be included in the bill. It makes provision for parent councils and local authorities to be equally represented on such appointment panels.

The wording of amendment 30 is very similar to that of schedule 2(2) to the School Boards (Scotland) Act 1988. In evidence to the Education

Committee, Bill McGregor of the Headteachers Association of Scotland said:

"The bill sets out to improve parental involvement and to encourage parents to join in the life of the school, so I would have thought that partnership would be implicit when it came to employing and appointing senior staff. My experience in 15 years as a head teacher was that parents thought it absolutely vital to be involved in that. One of the ironies of the bill is that it actually presents an opportunity to reduce the role of parents. I would find that very difficult to live with."—[*Official Report, Education Committee*, 14 December 2005; c 2917.]

Given that ministers have already introduced a provision to ensure that parents on appointments panels receive appropriate training, I strongly urge members to support amendment 30 in order to make certain that parents retain their influence over this crucial area.

Margo MacDonald: Will the member give way?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I have finished, but I will give way to let Margo MacDonald have her say.

Margo MacDonald: I have a question for Lord James. I put the worst possible case to him: what if not enough parents take enough of an interest or participate enough? Amendment 30 appears to be prescriptive.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The provision has worked well under the School Boards (Scotland) Act 1988. Given that there is no great problem of the sort that Margo MacDonald raised, it is most unlikely that that would be the case in future. I believe that parents want to be fully involved, as they have been in the past.

I move amendment 30.

Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West) (Ind): The appointment of a head teacher is absolutely crucial to the success of a school: a good head teacher can make a school and a bad head teacher can ruin one.

It used to be the case that only elected councillors were involved in the appointment process; something that was not satisfactory. Some years ago, I attended an interview for appointment as a principal teacher. The interview panel consisted of over 30 councillors. They were seated behind a long table and their average age looked to be 70 plus. I found the whole thing intimidating. The director of education read out my CV and said, "Gentlemen, are there any questions?" There was only an embarrassing silence, a few coughs and a shuffling of feet. The director of education then said, "The candidate will leave the room." I wondered what on earth I had done wrong. I never saw a more farcical interview situation in all my life. It is not sour grapes that makes me say that the appointment process must

be improved, because for some reason that I do not understand I got the job.

The bill says:

“The appointment process must entail involvement in it of any Parent Council established for the school to which an appointment is to be made.”

I agree with that, but the bill does not say how such involvement is to be achieved. There is merit in amendment 30, which would ensure parity of representation between the education authority and the parent council. Parents would make intelligent input into the appointment process—I am sure that parents’ input would be much more intelligent than was the input into the interview that I endured all those years ago. I will support amendment 30 unless the minister persuades me to do otherwise.

Iain Smith: I am concerned about the prescriptive nature of amendment 30. The bill makes it clear that there will be continued parental involvement in the appointment of head teachers to schools. In parallel with the bill’s progress through the Parliament, the Executive consulted on procedures for the appointment of head teachers, because the system must be modernised to take account of the fact that the employment and education worlds have moved on since the legislation on school boards was enacted. The current process is too restrictive in its approach to parental involvement. In particular, parents can be involved only at the final interview stage, whereas they should be involved much earlier in the process. Parents should have a role in determining the sort of head teacher that their school needs and should take part in discussions with education authorities. Such opportunities do not exist under the current arrangements, but will be possible if the bill is passed.

It is important that there should be flexibility in the appointment process, so that there can be horses for courses. We should not prescribe the number of education authority or parent council members who should be on an appointment panel in every circumstance. Sometimes it might be appropriate for a majority of parents to be involved; sometimes less parental involvement will be needed at the final stage of the appointment process than is needed earlier. The Executive made clear—I hope that the minister will again say on the record—that it will ensure that parental involvement in the appointment process will continue and be enhanced when the bill is enacted.

Fiona Hyslop: Amendment 30 concerns one of the most controversial matters in the bill. The Executive’s response to the consultation on the appointment procedure was published only halfway through stage 2.

Iain Smith has perhaps made the argument for agreeing to Lord James Douglas-Hamilton’s amendment 30, which would require appointment panels to consist of equal numbers of people from the education authority and the parent council and would ensure that a member of the education authority would have the casting vote. Most of the appointment procedure can be dealt with in guidance, but the relationship between the head teacher and the parent council is crucial and the requirement that an appointment panel should consist of equal numbers of members of the education authority and members of the parent council should be enshrined in statute.

Iain Smith said that parents might be in the majority on an appointment panel, but I disagree with such an approach. As we were repeatedly told by unions and local authorities, the local authority is the employer and must take the ultimate responsibility for the appointment. For exactly the reason why Iain Smith argues for flexibility, we think that the bill should provide for the composition of the appointment panel. The arrangements in amendment 30 are equitable and fair and would reflect the new era of professionalism in appointments and the education authority’s role as the employer.

Robert Brown: The debate has been good and important issues have been raised. As I said during stage 2, partnership is central to our approach in all aspects of the bill. The debate on amendment 30 has been characterised by an obsession with arithmetic and parity of membership of appointment panels, as opposed to concern about the quality of the appointments process. Partnership working will involve not just parents and local authorities—and the 90,000 or so councillors Dennis Canavan mentioned—but professional interests and knowledgeable parents, by which I mean parents who have had the opportunity to gain experience or receive training. Indeed, other members of appointment panels should have had such opportunities.

Section 14(2) says:

“The appointment process must entail involvement in it of any Parent Council established for the school to which an appointment is to be made.”

That is an important provision, but it is the minimum that will be required. Section 14(3) gives the Scottish ministers power, by regulation, to

“impose requirements which an appointment process must satisfy”

and, by notice, to

“require an education authority to make such changes to their appointment process as may be specified in the notice.”

So we have general and specific powers, which should enable us to take the appropriate action.

16:15

As Iain Smith said, we consulted widely on the draft bill. Importantly, we asked about the overarching principles of replacing and modernising the appointments process for senior staff and of retaining and extending parental involvement in that process. The further consultation in November asked about the finer details of the proposal. As I have said, our intention is that such detail should be set out in regulations rather than in primary legislation, as that will allow the process to adapt more easily to wider changes in the education agenda, not least of which are the changes to the standard for headship. In the debate on the previous group of amendments, Fiona Hyslop and I mentioned the importance of education leadership, as did Dennis Canavan a moment ago. The responses to the consultation show little or no enthusiasm for a return to the prescriptive legislation that we have at present, which has quickly become out of step because of changes to education practice and can cause unnecessary delays in the appointment process.

The bill is about parental involvement, and we want parents to be involved in the appointment of senior staff, but we must strike a balance between all the interests. We are not trying to set one group against another; we believe that appointment panels are stronger when they contain all the perspectives and when the members are focused on their single common interest, which is collectively to get the best possible candidate for the school. I agree entirely with Dennis Canavan's comments on that matter. However, our view remains that the Executive should not prescribe from the centre the detailed composition of panels, as that would apply to small rural schools, great big secondary schools and everything between.

Through regulations, we want to optimise parents' involvement at all stages of the appointment process. The bill makes appropriate provision, builds on the best of current practice and will allow flexibility in the future while guaranteeing parents a substantial and appropriate part in the procedure. Nevertheless, the central point is not about where people come from; rather it is about the quality of the input and of the outcome, by which I mean the standard of the head teacher who is appointed. I ask the Parliament to resist amendment 30, on the basis that the matters will be dealt with in regulations and that the provisions in the bill are appropriate and proportionate.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Lord James Douglas-Hamilton to wind up and to say whether he wishes to press or withdraw amendment 30.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I wish to press amendment 30.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The question is, that amendment 30 be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 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)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 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)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (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)
 McGregor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Ind)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Petrie, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)
 Watt, Ms Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

AGAINST

Arbuckle, Mr Andrew (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (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)
 Home Robertson, John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 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)
 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)
 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)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)

Schedule

REPEALS

Amendments 25 and 26 moved—[Robert Brown]—and agreed to.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes the consideration of amendments.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 41, Against 60, Abstentions 0.

Amendment 30 disagreed to.

Section 16—Establishment etc of Combined Parent Council

Amendments 18 to 20 moved—[Robert Brown]—and agreed to.

Section 18—Abolition of School Boards

Amendments 21 and 22 moved—[Robert Brown]—and agreed to.

Section 20—Interpretation

Amendments 23 and 24 moved—[Robert Brown]—and agreed to.

Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Bill

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): The next item of business is a debate on motion S2M-4271, in the name of Peter Peacock, on the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Bill. Minister, you have a tight 6 minutes.

16:22

The Minister for Education and Young People (Peter Peacock): In that case I will not hang about.

As the bill reaches its final stage, we have a chance to reflect on it and why we introduced it. First and foremost, the bill is about improving parents' involvement in their children's education and in schools. It is about encouraging parents, schools, education authorities and others to work together for the benefit of our young people. All the evidence is that, when parents are effectively involved in their children's education, the outcome for their children is better.

The bill complements our wider developments in education policy, such as the ambitious, excellent schools programme, devolved school management and "A Curriculum for Excellence", all of which are designed to provide more freedom, trust and flexibility and less central control and direction of education policy. The bill is a vital part of the wider framework that we are developing for Scottish education. Parents and their commitment to their children add value to what we do. This is about parents doing what they can, in their circumstances, to support their children. That is why the bill places duties on Scottish ministers to promote parental involvement and on education authorities to develop strategies for parental involvement.

However, we want to reform how parents are represented. As part of that, we will reform the inflexible system of school boards brought in by the School Boards (Scotland) Act 1988. The 1988 act was a creature of its time and the prevailing political environment. In these days of devolution, it is no longer appropriate for the Government to tell parents how many people can sit on their school board, who should be involved in meetings or what should be discussed. Under the bill, parents will have the power to decide locally on the format that suits them and their school. That local flexibility is the key element of the bill and was welcomed by the majority of those giving evidence to the Education Committee when it considered the principles of the bill.

I am aware that some have greeted that flexibility with a bit of alarm, envisaging parents'

valuable time being taken up with deciding myriad constitutions and formats. That is why I want to assure members that parents will not be left without good templates, advice and guidance on how to proceed. We will develop a toolkit to enable schools, parents and education authorities to work together to decide on such matters. I anticipate that that toolkit and the guidance that will accompany the bill will be ready this autumn.

I thank those who have contributed to the process of getting the bill to this point: the wide range of individuals and groups who responded to the consultation and gave evidence to the Education Committee; the members of the Education Committee; the clerking team; my bill team; Robert Brown; and the parental involvement field team, which has been working with education authorities to improve understanding of what the bill will mean in practice. All those individuals and groups have contributed to the bill as it is today.

The consultation process enabled us to refine the first draft of the bill. For example, there was a clear call for head teachers to be given the right and the duty to attend parent council meetings and the bill has been revised to address that. There was an element of misunderstanding about what the body to represent parents in a school would look like, so we clarified the two-tier relationship between the parent forum—all parents at the school—and the parent council, which is the body that will represent parents in the day-to-day business of the school. The parent councils of denominational schools will now have representation from the relevant denomination. In the subsequent consultation on the appointment of head teachers, we gave parents and others the opportunity to input to that very specific section of the bill.

I have said many times that the appointment of a head teacher is crucial for a school and the communities that it serves, yet it might happen only once every 20 years or so for that school. We know from our discussions with key stakeholders involved in the process that the arrangements set out in the 1988 act are no longer fit for purpose. Employment legislation and procedures have moved on since then and schedule 2 to the 1988 act has prevented authorities from making full use of the modern recruitment processes now available. Primary legislation is not the right place to set out all the detailed appointments procedures. The bill creates an enabling framework for local authorities, which reflects both employment legislation and the value added by greater participation of parents. It establishes the conditions that the appointments procedures must satisfy and allows for future flexibility in appointing senior staff. That will fit in with our wider education leadership agenda.

Critics have claimed that the lack of prescription will reduce the involvement of parents, but we are absolutely committed to ensuring a robust role for parents in the process; securing the professionalism of the appointments process; and enabling local authorities to develop appointments arrangements that best suit their needs. Our aim is to ensure that parents are involved at all key stages of the process, not only the final interview as at present. Earlier engagement in the process will offer more meaningful involvement. As Robert Brown indicated, we will introduce regulations later in the year and issue guidance to optimise parental involvement in those processes.

We now have a bill that will make a difference to Scottish education and that is flexible enough to stand the test of time. When Robert Brown opened the stage 1 debate on the bill he said:

"the most potent influence on children's education and life prospects is their parents."—[*Official Report*, 22 February 2006; c 23364.]

That is why the bill is important and why I commend it to the Parliament. However, it is only a start, as there is much more to be done to implement it. I hope that a strong national voice for parents in future education policy and the representation of their interests will be a by-product of all that we are doing.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees that the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Bill be passed.

16:25

Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP): The process has been frustrating for many of us, but I hope that the minister realises that, despite our reservations about the importance of the bill and the priority that should be given to it, the Scottish National Party has approached it constructively by scrutinising the bill and trying to introduce measures to improve it when we thought fit to do so.

The Parliament must decide when it is time to legislate and time not to legislate; it must decide what is best delivered through policy and what is best delivered through law. The key element of parental involvement in education will not be delivered by law but by policy and enthusiastic people—head teachers, council officials, parents and, indeed, the teachers, who are hidden in the shadows of the bill and do not get a mention.

Despite those facts and the reservations that we expressed at stage 1, when we were concerned that the ministers had rushed the bill's introduction without consulting on the appointments procedure, SNP members will not stand in its way. It is not the most important bill for the Parliament to consider. In the minister's portfolio alone, there are

proposals for legislation on adoption and fostering, on children's hearings and much-needed legislation on child protection. The idea that any of that could or might have been delayed because of this bill is of serious concern. Everybody who was concerned with school boards recognised that there was a need for modernisation, but there was no clarion call from school boards, parents or teachers for the bill to be one of the main objects of the Executive's concentration.

There has been much movement since the proposals were first published and progress has been made on a variety of issues. The two-tier solution has addressed many of the concerns about the democratic accountability of ensuring that the parent forums had leadership that could represent parents' views, and the Executive has listened to representations on early years education. I welcome that, but the Executive should also acknowledge that Opposition parties have given it latitude and accepted that more detail should be in guidance. There has been dispute about whether we should have required more detail in the bill, but we have given that latitude in the good faith that, when the Executive introduces the secondary legislation, it will pay due regard to the proposals that the committee made at stage 2.

The SNP will support the bill, but I emphasise that the bill's most important aspect is the provisions on parents' involvement in their children's education. If we are to effect a sea change and ensure that the Scottish children who currently underperform get a chance in education, we must work with parents to achieve that. It will not happen in isolation, because most of a child's education and experience does not happen within school but is formed outwith school. Bringing those parts together is a worthwhile aim.

I sincerely hope that the minister's and the councils' education strategies will reflect those points and that they will be part and parcel of the bill's implementation.

16:29

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton (Lothians) (Con): Ministers will not be astonished to learn that the Conservatives would have set about the bill in a different way, especially given the results of the consultation. At present, 97 per cent of secondary schools and 88 per cent of primary schools have school boards, and it would have been our wish for the present system to be modernised and brought up to date, rather than engaging in what I would describe as a gale of creative destruction.

As ministers will recall, only 13 per cent of those who were consulted called for the abolition of

school boards. The way in which the bill is being imposed on schools in Scotland does not exactly reflect the wishes of those who were consulted. It does not even reflect the views of the Executive in 2004, when it republished the School Boards (Scotland) Act 1988 with a new introduction, which stated that boards were

“in a unique position as a mechanism for the two-way flow of information between parents, schools and education authorities”.

If school boards were able to attract such favourable coverage from the Executive two years ago, why is there now such a wholesale push for their abolition?

Since the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Bill obtained a parliamentary majority at stage 1, we have bent over backwards to improve it. However, with the best will in the world, we cannot escape the conclusion that parental rights to participate in the appointment of head teachers will not be as strong as they were before. Parents were represented in equal numbers with local authority officials, and they had a key role to play in the appointment of head teachers. The bill will not continue that. At question time on 7 September 2005, the First Minister said:

“Of course the new bodies might lose one or two powers”.—[*Official Report*, 7 September 2005; c 18944.]

I accept that parents will be involved in an advisory capacity, but they will not have the statutory rights and the clout that they have today. I respect the minister's views but, although we give maximum support for parental rights, the Executive's policy in that regard is such that we cannot support the bill. We believe that it weakens parental rights and that, like an apple in fermentation, it is good only in parts. As I mentioned at an earlier stage, we would view a diminution in the statutory role of parents as a retrograde step. In spite of all the minister's endeavours, we will be unable to support the bill.

16:32

Iain Smith (North East Fife) (LD): I will start with my convener hat on, rather than my party hat, and thank the Education Committee for the constructive way in which the bill has been dealt with throughout the process—other than during the debates in the chamber, perhaps. The process has been very constructive, and it has been helpful in ensuring that the legislation that we will pass this evening will be better than the bill that was sent to the committee.

I thank the Minister for Education and Young People and his team for the part that they have played, from the original consultation proposals that were published last year, to the bill that was presented to the committee, to the bill that we will

pass today. The bill shows that the parliamentary process works, that consultation works and that legislation is improved as a result of what we do here. I thank those who gave evidence to the committee, those who lodged amendments and, of course, the committee clerks, for all their support throughout.

The bill is not just about modernising and replacing—it is not about abolishing school boards, but about modernising and replacing school boards with the new parent forums and parent councils. As Fiona Hyslop has rightly stressed throughout the debate, the bill is also about parental—

David McLetchie (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con): Will the member give way a second?

Iain Smith: Certainly.

David McLetchie: The member says that the bill is not about abolishing school boards. I refer him to section 18, which is entitled “Abolition of School Boards”.

Iain Smith: It is not about the abolition of school boards; it is about the abolition of the School Boards (Scotland) Act 1988, which—

David McLetchie: No, it is not.

Iain Smith: Let me finish. That act set up a very rigid system for parental representation in schools, which is not appropriate for all schools and does not allow all schools to do the best they can with the opportunities that ought to be available. The bill replaces those school boards with a new structure that will allow more flexibility and let schools develop what best suits their circumstances and needs. That is a positive step forward. This is not about diminishing the rights of parents in any way. In fact, the bill significantly enhances the rights of parents through the establishment of the parent forums and through the flexible arrangements that will be in place for the parent councils that will replace the school boards.

The bill is also about parents' involvement in the education of their children in the wider sense. The most important aspect of the bill is the fact that it places a statutory duty on the Scottish Executive and education authorities to promote the involvement of parents. That is not just about their involvement in the parent forums and parent councils; it is about their involvement in the education of their children. That is a significant new statutory duty on education officials at local authority and Executive level, which could have a major impact on the quality of education. We could all take issue with one or two matters.

It is important to have a clear timetable soon for implementing the bill and to have the guidance and the toolkit, so that existing school boards have

a clear idea of the process for managing the change to the new set-up. Many people opposed the abolition of school boards, without knowing exactly what would replace them, through fear that something would be removed. When the legislation is in place, it will allow parents to see that the opportunities of the legislation are much greater than the threats that many people have promoted. Indeed, the Scottish School Board Association, which was a major critic of the draft bill, has said while the Parliament has been considering the bill that the bill provides great opportunities for more parental involvement in schools.

The bill is good. The act that it will become might not be the most important legislation the Parliament has passed, but it is necessary. It has been claimed that school boards could be modernised, but because the process was tied down by legislation, what school boards did could be amended only through primary legislation. That was nonsense. The bill will allow much more flexibility and provide a much better approach for parents.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We now move to the open debate. I call Robin Harper, who has two minutes.

16:36

Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): I will restrict my remarks. My colleagues in the Scottish Green Party and I are glad to see the bill. My response to Fiona Hyslop's criticism that the bill might be getting in the way of other legislation on children and young people is that it is a pity that the bill was not introduced earlier—perhaps three or four years ago—so that the quality of responses to legislation that is coming our way would be even better. That is not a reflection on the quality of responses, but the bill will certainly facilitate the full involvement of parents in all aspects of education, including the preparation of legislation.

From my reading of the submissions, I think that Children in Scotland will be pleased with the bill. Its only disappointment might be that amendment 2 was not agreed to. The Commission for Racial Equality made recommendations and described problems that parents experience, such as

“a sense of disenfranchisement, the sense of not having anything to offer and discomfort and isolation”,

which are not restricted to people from ethnic minorities. The Executive is right to leave obligations to regulations and to keep them flexible.

The same applies to the debate on the final amendment, which was on the appointment of head teachers. Employment legislation constantly changes and it is essential to have legislation that

allows flexibility, to permit continued adaptation to changing conditions.

I am happy to support the bill.

16:38

Mr Kenneth Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): Despite the Education Committee's constructive and productive efforts and the equally open-minded approach of the Executive, which listened to some of the early concerns that were expressed and accordingly lodged amendments, the Opposition parties have shown a lack of support for the bill—I think that the SNP showed grudging acceptance—which disappoints me.

In particular, I am dismayed at Lord James Douglas-Hamilton's description of the bill as spiteful. I have always thought him one of the least spiteful members of the Parliament, but his remark is revealing. Most of us suspect that the initial school boards legislation was motivated by dogma—the political drive to create a device by which schools could opt out of the comprehensive system. Lord James's remarks confirm that, as it is clear that he believes that the only motivation for abolishing school boards is to be equally politically spiteful. I suggest that to think that is to misread the bill and the intentions behind it.

The bill is a practical measure that is designed to introduce some flexibility in what has been an overly prescriptive and rigid system. It is less focused on the nature or form of parental representation than it is on finding the best way to involve parents at all levels in their local school's work.

We should take the opportunity to thank the many thousands of parents who have served on school boards. In my area, school boards have been very successful and conscientious in carrying out their duties and their efforts have been productive, but that has not been the case everywhere. Those of us who are familiar with the formal election processes to school boards know that they can be daunting and that they have clearly been off-putting for many people.

The bill will end the artificial divide between parent-teacher associations and school boards. I thank the Scottish Parent Teacher Council and Judith Gillespie for her evidence to the committee. It is simply wrong to create the idea that a person is welcome in a school if they have something to offer in the way of fundraising but that people have little to contribute to the good running of the institution or to pupils' learning unless they are elected to the school board.

The most important measure in the bill is not that which focuses on the nature of parental representation, the abolition of school boards or

the creation of school councils, but the duty on ministers and local authorities to involve parents in the education of their children to a greater extent. That is what will make the difference in our children's achievement and attainment levels and where the clear benefits of the bill will be seen.

I commend the bill to the Parliament.

16:40

Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con): I did not intend to speak in this debate, but I want to say that I cannot recall being charged with any degree of nastiness in anything that I have done in 26 years as an elected representative. Such charges have been made today to which I must respond.

Adam Ingram suggested that I was chasing lurid tabloid headlines. To be honest, that is a case of the pot calling the kettle black. He may have noticed that I have refrained from seeking personal publicity of late; I emphasise that I did not seek such publicity when I lodged my amendment.

The reason for the amendment's late appearance is that constituents and other groups were disappointed and thought that the matter should have been addressed in the bill and by the committee. They felt strongly that the previous school board legislation had got things right on the issue in question. That is why I presented the case that I presented.

If members who serve in this chamber, which we are told is part of a new parliamentary democracy, cannot stand up and honestly state their views without receiving personal abuse, that is degrading.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We now move to winding-up speeches, which I must keep tight—indeed, I will have to cut them back slightly.

16:42

Dr Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab): The fear to which Iain Smith referred has been caused by misinformation that was primarily put about by the Conservative party about the bill's provisions and intentions. As Ken Macintosh rightly said, the primary purpose of the Conservatives' previous legislation, which established school boards, was to encourage schools to opt out from local education authority control. As I said in an earlier debate, the legislation was not successful in achieving that aim, but school boards were successful in encouraging parents to become more involved in the running of their children's schools.

Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Ind): Will the member take an intervention?

Dr Murray: No. I am sorry, but I have only three minutes.

I agree that the bill is not just about sweeping away the previous legislation—it is about building on it and modernising and reforming it to provide a more flexible arrangement that will allow parents to decide how they would like to be involved in school arrangements. The current school boards can be retained if that is what parents want, but the structure of the parent representative body can be changed if it is felt that that is more appropriate to the school.

I am surprised at what Lord James Douglas-Hamilton said. In support of amendment 1, he said that parents rather than the Government should shape how things develop. That is entirely what the bill is about.

I recently attended a forum on discrimination in my constituency. It was specifically said in one workshop that school boards are not inclusive. In fact, I was asked to go to the Executive to suggest that the legislation be reformed. I was pleased to tell the audience that the Executive had already taken the matter on board and that reform was imminent.

As the minister said, the bill is a start in increasing parental involvement in children's education. Legislation alone cannot deliver increased involvement, but it can provide a framework.

I am pleased that the SNP supports the bill, but I wonder why SNP members think that other pieces of legislation have been delayed. I am certainly not aware of other pieces of legislation that have been held back because of it.

Fiona Hyslop: Will the member take an intervention?

Dr Murray: No. I am sorry, but I have only a minute left.

James Douglas-Hamilton mentioned appointments. As the minister said, parents will be involved much earlier in the process of selecting head teachers, so they will have greater influence, but it must be recognised that head teachers are the employees of local authorities and that responsibility for their appointment rests with local authorities. However, it would be an unwise local authority that went against the wishes of the parent council, as that would hardly bode well for the operation of the parent council in future.

Like many members, I was disappointed by Mr Gallie's speech. I will not be verbally abusive towards him, but I feel that his last-ditch intervention—in which he tried to revive the spectres that haunted the Parliament in its early days around the discussions on the abolition of section 2A—was most unfortunate. If his constituents had raised the matter as a concern at that time, the Conservatives should have lodged

an amendment at stage 2 and had the matter fully discussed then.

I am pleased to support the bill.

16:45

David McLetchie (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con): No amount of tinkering with the bill today can disguise the fact that it is an unwanted and unnecessary piece of legislation that is motivated by malice and designed to destroy a structure for parental involvement and representation in the governance of our schools that was one of the many great achievements of the last Conservative Government. The very existence of the bill ignores the evidence of the Scottish Executive's own consultation exercise, which overwhelmingly demonstrated that there is no justification and little support for it. It typifies an attitude of mind that ignores the big issues that Scottish education faces and, instead, prefers to dismantle a system that is working well.

There is not a shred of evidence to suggest that the new parent councils will increase parental involvement either in the overall life of the school or in the education of the parents' children. Parent councils are a very poor substitute for school boards and parent-teacher associations, and the so-called, much-trumpeted new rights in the bill are no more than the enactment of existing good practice. Crucially, the powers that are enjoyed by school boards in relation to senior staff appointments have been emasculated.

The big issues in Scottish education relate to poor attainment levels in the basics of literacy and numeracy; indiscipline and violence against teachers; falling school rolls; the closure and merger of schools against the wishes of parents; the artificial limits that are now placed on primary school intakes; the rise in composite classes; the elimination of parental choice; the running down of special needs schools in the face of what can be described only as a mania for mainstreaming; and the lack of diversity in our system, which, for example, denies Steiner schools a place in the state school system. Those are the big issues that Scottish education faces, but they are the issues that the Scottish Executive will not tackle. The Executive says that it wants to run the best small country in the world. Well, it will not achieve that by being the best small-minded Government in the world.

The bill is petty, pathetic and perverse, and it should be rejected by the Parliament.

16:48

Mr Adam Ingram (South of Scotland) (SNP): As the minister will be aware, SNP members have been sceptical about the benefits to be gained

from the bill. It still appears to us to be too much about changing structures rather than changing attitudes and working practices. In particular, we believe that the emphasis on parental involvement in schools should be about building a partnership between parents and teachers, so that the support for learning that is provided to our children at home as well as in schools is of the highest possible order and will enable pupils to take full advantage of the educational opportunities that are offered by our school system.

The changes that the bill proposes will, in themselves, do little to draw in the parents of the persistent 20 per cent of children who appear to derive little benefit from their schooling in terms of attainment or preparation for the world of work. It is a moot point whether legislation of this kind can achieve the culture change that is badly needed.

Although the minister has bowed to pressure to include reference to parental involvement in the early years, which should help with the transition from nursery to primary school, I do not believe that he has gone far enough. We believe that the absence of a duty on education authorities to promote such involvement is a missed opportunity. We will have to return to the building of relationships between parents, early-years staff and teachers if and when the Executive gets around to presenting us with a strategy for the early years and child care. We should be looking at effecting a culture change in that area of policy and attacking the vicious cycle of poverty, deprivation and low educational attainment that blights the lives of one in five Scottish children.

That said, we acknowledge the fact that ministers have addressed many of the weaknesses in the original bill proposals. Despite the somewhat over-the-top attacks from the Tories, most stakeholders, including the Scottish School Board Association, are at least reconciled to the changes that the bill will make to parental involvement mechanisms. It would therefore be churlish of us to turn our scepticism into opposition to the bill. We wish it well for the future.

16:51

The Deputy Minister for Education and Young People (Robert Brown): This afternoon, we have been through the final stage of a legislative process that began, as these things often do, with anxieties and concerns about our purpose, and, indeed, opposition from some quarters. However, as many members have said, the process has refined the bill as we have gone through the consultation on the draft bill and later through the committee process. We have ended up with a high degree of consensus and recognition that the bill is dynamic and flexible enough to meet the needs of different

communities around Scotland, and to make a real difference to parents and young people.

I welcome the SNP's support for the bill, even if it is a little grudging.

It is very clear that young people benefit from parental interest and involvement in their futures and in their education in particular. As many have said, the legislative process is the beginning, not the end. The culture change that we want will come out of what happens thereafter. With the guidance and toolkit that are in preparation, the legislation will provide the skeleton, but life will be breathed into it if it engages the interest and enthusiasm of parents throughout Scotland during the transition year of preparation for the new framework and during the years to come.

I encourage schools, parents and education authorities to take this opportunity to look anew at the way in which parents are involved and represented. I encourage them to use the flexibility that the bill will offer, to be creative, to build on the work and success of the school boards, and to look wider, to consider the weaknesses of the current system, the reasons why relatively few parents get involved, the challenges and barriers to greater parental involvement, and to make arrangements that are more participative, more inclusive, more outward looking and, dare I say it, more fun.

Some schools and education authorities are already doing quite exciting things. For example, at a primary school in the Borders that does not have a school board, the head teacher set up a school interest group to work towards improving partnership, to support the school through social and fundraising events and to act as a consultative group. There is a primary school in Angus—again without a school board—that developed a parent support group through advertising in the paper and sending letters home with the children. Again, that group sought to promote co-operation between parents and teachers in an informal and flexible way.

Just as different styles of education and pupil engagement can motivate and excite pupils, so can different styles of parental involvement engage parents. The range and potential informality of the new parent councils should be a big bonus that is capable of attracting the best of the school board and PTA traditions and something else besides.

As we are all aware, the bill is not just about representation. I am thinking of the secondary school in Edinburgh that identified the fact that parents and children have worries about the transition from primary to secondary school and took steps to address those worries. I am also thinking of the primary school in North Lanarkshire

that spotted the need to make parents feel welcome in the school and evolved a welcoming reception area with facilities and information specifically aimed at parents.

Those are small things in themselves, but they are important and go to the heart of what the bill is about—and they are the kind of things I want to happen throughout Scotland. There should be not just pockets of good practice in individual schools, but innovative and relevant ideas that come from the people who know best about the needs of their children. The bill will place a duty on education authorities to take a strategic approach to parental involvement, to ensure that those sorts of examples are not unique to particular schools. The challenge and excitement of parental involvement should be firmly on the agenda across the board.

Fiona Hyslop: Will the minister give way?

Robert Brown: I am sorry, but I do not have time in this brief summing up.

If the bill is passed, the Executive will provide support and direction for parents, school staff and education authorities.

As the bill will not be fully commenced until August 2007, the Executive's intention is to use the intervening year to work with stakeholders to ensure that the transition is as smooth as possible. The field team will continue to work with individual education authorities to encourage the sharing and spread of good practice and practical support. As it travelled around Scotland, the field team saw the mood among authorities and parents shift, as it has in the Parliament, from one of weariness and apprehension at the prospect of change to one of anticipation and eagerness to get going.

I must confess that I was disappointed by the Conservative party's opposition to the bill. Frankly, the unusually baleful press release that came from Lord James Douglas-Hamilton—at least, it was in Lord James's name—was unworthy of the generous spirit that he normally brings to such matters. In this modern David Cameron age, the Tories will need to keep control of these Thatcherite—or perhaps Gallie-ite—press officers if they want to be taken seriously in our debates.

The bill will give parents serious opportunities and provide them with far more rights than are available under the current highly regulated and centralised structures. The Executive is about liberating parents to work most effectively for the best interests of their children; the Conservatives are about restricting, regulating and controlling them. The Tories are about scaremongering, doom, gloom and populist headlines; we are about engagement, involvement, empowerment, trusting parents and, as I said before, fun. The key to the success of the bill lies with parents, who will be able to grasp the opportunities and the

encouragement that the bill gives them. We believe that parents and education authorities will rise to the challenge.

The bill is part of our wider jigsaw of education reform and improvement, to give more children a better start and greater opportunities in life. We are providing better schools, more teachers, better training and the dynamism of real parental involvement in the education of their children.

I commend the motion to the Parliament.

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): As we have finished one and a half minutes early, I will suspend the meeting until 16:59.

16:57

Meeting suspended.

16:59

On resuming—

Housing Corporation (Delegation) etc Bill

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): The next item of business is consideration of motion S2M-4318, in the name of Malcolm Chisholm, on the Housing Corporation (Delegation) etc Bill, which is United Kingdom legislation.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the UK Parliament should consider those provisions of the Housing Corporation (Delegation) etc. Bill, introduced in the House of Commons on 30 March 2006, which will legislate in devolved areas in respect of the past operation of the Housing Corporation in Scotland as outlined in LCM (6.1).—[*Malcolm Chisholm.*]

The Presiding Officer: The question on the motion will be put at decision time.

Business Motions

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S2M-4366, in the name of Margaret Curran, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme. Members who wish to speak against the motion should press their request-to-speak buttons now.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Wednesday 17 May 2006

2.00 pm Time for Reflection
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
followed by Stage 1 Debate: Planning etc. (Scotland) Bill
followed by Financial Resolution: Planning etc. (Scotland) Bill
followed by Business Motion
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.30 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business

Thursday 18 May 2006

9.15 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions
followed by Independents' Group Debate: The Implications of the Kerr Report: Future Needs of the NHS
followed by Procedures Committee Debate—2nd Report 2006, Procedures relating to Crown appointments
 11.40 am General Question Time
 12 noon First Minister's Question Time
 2.15 pm Themed Question Time—Health and Community Care; Environment and Rural Development
 2.55 pm Enterprise and Culture Committee Debate—5th Report 2006, Business Growth—the next 10 years
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 24 May 2006

2.30 pm Time for Reflection
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
followed by Executive Business
followed by Business Motion
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business

Thursday 25 May 2006

9.15 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions
followed by Stage 3 Proceedings: Police, Public Order and Criminal Justice (Scotland) Bill
 11.40 am General Question Time
 12 noon First Minister's Question Time
 2.15 pm Themed Question Time—Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning; Justice and Law Officers
 2.55 pm Continuation of Stage 3 Proceedings: Police, Public Order and Criminal Justice (Scotland) Bill
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business
 and (b) under Rule 11.2.4 of the Standing Orders that Decision Time on Wednesday 17 May 2006 shall begin at 5.30 pm.—[George Lyon.]

16:59

Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD): In speaking against the business motion, I propose that the programme that is proposed for Wednesday 17 May should be exchanged with that which is proposed for Wednesday 24 May.

I argue for that change because there is a lack of time for members adequately to consider the Planning etc (Scotland) Bill. The Executive is acting within the strict letter of the law, as proposed by the Procedures Committee before I became a member of it. I was not responsible for the current provision. The committee decided that the stage 1 debate on a bill could take place no earlier than the fifth sitting day after the stage 1 report had been published. In this case, the Executive has just managed that. However, the business motion is against the spirit of many recent discussions that we have had about having more time for members to consider legislation, giving members who are not on the lead committee time to study the bill properly, getting the views of outside bodies and so on.

Although the Executive is acting within the letter of the law, it is not acting within the spirit of the law. Members should have longer to study an extremely important and complicated bill, which arouses a great deal of feeling on different issues, so that we can debate it adequately. I propose that the business motion be amended accordingly.

17:01

The Deputy Minister for Finance, Public Service Reform and Parliamentary Business (George Lyon): I am happy to take on board Mr

Gorrie's proposal that we examine the scheduling, on the basis that, depending on the size of the bill in question, the requirement that there be five sitting days between a committee producing a stage 1 report and the stage 1 debate taking place may not be the only issue. However, I point out to the member that the Communities Committee is content with the date of the stage 1 debate. As members will be aware, the stage 1 deadline was set by the Parliamentary Bureau and could at any time have been extended at a member's request.

Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab):

As the convener of the Communities Committee, I do not think that Mr Lyon is in a position to claim that the committee is content, because the committee was never consulted on the matter.

George Lyon: I will certainly reflect on Karen Whitefield's comments and take the matter back to my colleagues. I point out to the Communities Committee that a delay in holding the stage 1 debate would have an impact on stage 2 consideration of the bill. The matter was discussed at the bureau earlier in the week and at that time no member expressed concerns about the shortness of the time between the publication of the report and the stage 1 debate. In view of what Mr Gorrie and the convener have said, the matter needs to be looked at. I give an undertaking that we will reflect on what has been said.

The Presiding Officer: The question is, that motion S2M-4366, in the name of Margaret Curran, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 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)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 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)
 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)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (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)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Petrie, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (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)
 Watt, Ms Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

AGAINST

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)
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)

Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Ind)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)

ABSTENTIONS

Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 86, Against 17, Abstentions 6.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Wednesday 17 May 2006

2.00 pm Time for Reflection
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
followed by Stage 1 Debate: Planning etc. (Scotland) Bill
followed by Financial Resolution: Planning etc. (Scotland) Bill
followed by Business Motion
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.30 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business

Thursday 18 May 2006

9.15 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions
followed by Independents' Group Debate: The Implications of the Kerr Report: Future Needs of the NHS
followed by Procedures Committee Debate—2nd Report 2006, Procedures relating to Crown appointments
 11.40 am General Question Time
 12 noon First Minister's Question Time
 2.15 pm Themed Question Time—Health and Community Care; Environment and Rural Development
 2.55 pm Enterprise and Culture Committee Debate—5th Report 2006, Business Growth—the next 10 years
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 24 May 2006

2.30 pm Time for Reflection
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Executive Business
followed by Business Motion
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business

Thursday 25 May 2006

9.15 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions
followed by Stage 3 Proceedings: Police, Public Order and Criminal Justice (Scotland) Bill
 11.40 am General Question Time
 12 noon First Minister's Question Time
 2.15 pm Themed Question Time—Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning; Justice and Law Officers
 2.55 pm Continuation of Stage 3 Proceedings: Police, Public Order and Criminal Justice (Scotland) Bill
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business

and (b) under Rule 11.2.4 of the Standing Orders that Decision Time on Wednesday 17 May 2006 shall begin at 5.30 pm.

The Presiding Officer: The next item of business is consideration of business motion S2M-4365, in the name of Margaret Curran, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a timetable for legislation.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Adult Support and Protection (Scotland) Bill at Stage 1 be completed by 17 November 2006.—[George Lyon.]

Motion agreed to.

Decision Time

17:05

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid):

There are two questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that motion S2M-4271, in the name of Peter Peacock, that the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Bill be passed, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 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)
 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)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 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)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

Martin, 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)
 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)
 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)
 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)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (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)
 Watt, Ms Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (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)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Ind)
 Petrie, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 92, Against 17, Abstentions 0.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees that the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Bill be passed.

The Presiding Officer: The second question is, that motion S2M-4318, in the name of Malcolm Chisholm, on the Housing Corporation

(Delegation) etc Bill, which is United Kingdom legislation, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees that the UK Parliament should consider those provisions of the Housing Corporation (Delegation) etc. Bill, introduced in the House of Commons on 30 March 2006, which will legislate in devolved areas in respect of the past operation of the Housing Corporation in Scotland as outlined in LCM (6.1).

Credit Unions

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh):

The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S2M-4052, in the name of Christine May, on new powers for credit unions. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament welcomes the extended facilities available to credit unions from April 2006 which will allow them to offer a wider range of services to their members; notes that these facilities will include insurance products, budgeting and savings accounts and flexible low-cost loans based on ability to pay; recognises the importance of the role played by credit unions in helping to alleviate poverty, prevent debt and its devastating consequences for many low income families, encourage saving and prudent borrowing and support regeneration in many communities across Scotland, such as Glenrothes and Levenmouth in Fife; further welcomes the additional support provided for approved credit unions to establish and administer these services; acknowledges that the credit union movement embodies and promotes the principles of mutualism and co-operation, and believes that the expansion of the credit union network in Scotland will play a vital part in enabling regeneration of many more communities.

17:07

Christine May (Central Fife) (Lab): Members will be aware that I am proud to be one of the seven Labour and Co-operative Party members of the Scottish Parliament. The credit union movement is part of the co-operative family, which has done a great deal to sustain our Scottish communities through some hard times and has brought many of them out of the far side.

I am pleased to welcome to the public gallery representatives of the Scottish credit union movement and of the co-operative movement. I have had some interesting information from them in their capacity as representatives of individual co-operatives and as members of the Association of British Credit Unions Ltd in Scotland.

Most members will want to speak about the credit union movement in their areas and—surprise, surprise—so will I. However, I am pleased that, unlike when I spoke this morning, I am not immediately preceding the Singing Kettle. Most people who heard me speak this morning could not wait for me to get off the stage so that the Singing Kettle could get on.

Others, among them my colleague Jackie Baillie, will want to highlight some of the concerns that the credit union movement in Scotland has with some aspects of the Bankruptcy and Diligence etc (Scotland) Bill, stage 1 of which has just been completed by the Enterprise and Culture Committee.

However, tonight's debate is primarily about the extended powers that have been given to credit unions by the Deputy Minister for Communities, Johann Lamont. Those powers relate to areas such as insurance products, budgeting and savings accounts and flexible, low-cost loans that are based on ability to pay. All those powers were requested by the Association of British Credit Unions Ltd in January this year, when it gave evidence to the Treasury Select Committee. Such an approach would provide incalculable help in building a savings ethos and reducing the pernicious influence of people who peddle loans with interest rates that are almost always exorbitant. Moreover, it would do what the credit union movement has long been very good at doing, which is to instil a savings ethos in people who perhaps never thought that they could have the discipline to save even a small amount or to build something that they could borrow against.

At the end of 2004, the credit union movement in Scotland had £130 million on loan to members. As the credit unions' average annual percentage rate is 12.7 per cent—which is, in fact, the maximum that unions can charge and is minuscule in comparison with the 900 per cent APR that some unscrupulous lenders have set—members and, indeed, communities can see that such a system is fairer and allows people to repay their borrowings. Much of the evidence that we have taken on the Bankruptcy and Diligence etc (Scotland) Bill has highlighted the fact that, although people are willing to pay back loans, they are unable to do so because of the structure of those loans and the attitude of lenders.

We have discovered that it is very difficult for people to get advice. When people are faced with crippling and mounting debts, they ignore the problem by not opening letters and so on. However, because credit unions are rooted in communities and because their volunteers are very often well known to those who borrow money, advice is easier to give and can be provided in a less threatening, less confrontational manner. For example, I do not know of a single credit union that has been guilty of phoning someone's mobile at 6 o'clock in the morning to demand payment.

Early credit unions developed in the United States, Canada and Jamaica. In Ireland, the first credit union was formed in 1958 by Nora Herlihy and her colleagues in the Dublin Centre Co-operative Society. The credit union movement was established in the United Kingdom by the Credit Unions Act 1979, which, when it was passed in the April of that year, was one of the last pieces of legislation to be passed by the outgoing Labour Government at Westminster.

The pervading aspect of credit unions is the fact that they are part of our communities' social fabric.

Quite often, but not always, operating at a small, local level, they offer a real alternative to doorstep moneylenders. Fife, for example, has a very well-developed credit union network; indeed, in 18 months, the Glenrothes and Levenmouth Credit Union has achieved a membership of more than 400 people, saved £100,000 and made £90,000 of loans. It has received Executive support for premises, and is seeking to expand to the whole of central Fife. Moreover, it is working with one primary school and hopes to work with another.

I would like the minister to consider two final points in her response. First, will she discuss with her colleague the Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning, Allan Wilson, the credit unions' concerns about the Bankruptcy and Diligence etc (Scotland) Bill to see whether there is a way forward in that respect? Secondly, the credit union movement has pointed out that some small unions that would like to offer the extended facilities are struggling with paperwork because they have no experience in business planning. Will the minister agree to have discussions on the matter and find out whether any assistance can be offered?

I commend the motion to the chamber. I thank everyone who has stayed to contribute to the debate and I look forward to the rest of the speeches.

17:15

Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP): If I did not know any better, Presiding Officer, I would have thought that your decision to call me to speak immediately after Christine May was a provocation to encourage me to assume the role of the Singing Kettle. My young children watched the Singing Kettle over many years and I feel I would be proficient in the role, but I will save the chamber that horror for the sake of this evening's debate.

I congratulate Christine May on securing the debate and on her speech on this important subject. I would like to discuss the practicalities of establishing credit unions where they do not exist. On behalf of constituents in Angus, I have raised the issue with ministers in correspondence. Those constituents are very enthusiastic about establishing a credit union but are finding that—although the Scottish Executive offers assistance to sustain and develop credit unions—the mechanisms to establish a credit union in the first place are left very much to local organisations. That can be justifiable, because it is important to prove that a credit union will have local support and participation. However, more could be done to ensure that more credit unions can be established. They can then go on to provide the support,

service and facilities that Christine May mentioned.

In small, rural communities that I represent, whose populations are thinly spread and whose geography is always a problem in any initiatives, I would like more effective support to be put in place to encourage new credit unions to start up, and more practical support to be offered during the start-up phase. Over the years, as I have supported constituents, I have been struck by the way in which credit unions can provide stability and order in people's financial arrangements. Those arrangements can get out of hand and become a great burden as people wrestle with their difficulties.

I hope that the debate will give further impetus to the support that the Government gives to the credit union movement. I am convinced that the credit union structure gives practical support to vulnerable individuals in our communities. I encourage the Government to find ways of giving greater assistance to the start-up process for new credit unions—perhaps in a partnership fashion—while trying to identify the level of local support to establish what would be a very beneficial measure to support people in our communities.

17:18

Dave Petrie (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I am very happy to speak in this evening's debate and I congratulate Christine May on bringing this most worthwhile and relevant subject to the chamber.

Credit unions and financial co-operatives offer a vital and—more important—accessible service for communities and individual members of society who experience difficulty in accessing alternative financial services. In this age of right to buy, low-interest mortgages and easily accessible credit, a significant number of less fortunate people experience, for a variety of reasons, serious difficulties in making ends meet because they do not have ready access to financial security. For that reason, it is important and appropriate that the valuable service that is offered by credit unions be acknowledged by members of this Parliament.

The ending of financial and social exclusion is a constant aim of our work, and credit unions have a significant role to play in that. The growing uptake of their services over the past three years signifies the importance of that role and the increased awareness among Scots of the value of those services.

Around 179,000 adults are now members of the 131 credit unions, which have assets of £185 million. The local and ethical nature of credit unions is obviously a factor both for their members and for the people who access their services. We

live in global times and are fully aware of the increasing competitiveness, and the ever-increasing anonymity, of financial service providers. The friendliness of credit unions can often make it easier for people to understand and accept the advice and warnings that they may give out. The benefits of being a member of a credit union and of utilising its services are important, so it is right that credit unions are encouraged.

Christine May's motion refers to the wider range of services that will now be offered by credit unions and to their overriding aims of helping to alleviate poverty and support regeneration in our communities. Given that poverty undoubtedly continues to blight the lives of far too many Scots, such financial commitment to regeneration is vital. The well-known research by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation vividly demonstrates the problems that we face. The number of working-age adults who have no dependent children and who are in income poverty has increased from around 300,000 in the mid-1990s to almost 400,000 in recent years, while the gap between the richest and the poorest in society is increasing.

Business rates, infrastructure and the cost of business start-ups in Scotland are examples of fundamental issues that must be tackled and which the Executive is addressing. I support any strategy that will contribute to such vital regeneration and help to combat material poverty. Accordingly, I support the development of credit unions and the introduction of the credit union assistance fund, which will be able to target and empower the low-income adults to whom I have referred.

I return to my opening paragraph and stress that the accessibility of credit unions is a vital component of their operation. It has been stated that the most effective way of breaking out of the poverty cycle is through education. The acquisition of financial literacy and knowledge can be the first step to overcoming financial strain and if investment in the growth of credit unions will bring about an increase in the number of people who have the knowledge and ability to take control confidently of their finances, it must be endorsed. I support the motion.

17:22

Bill Butler (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab): For the record, I state my membership of the Co-operative Party and I congratulate my fellow co-operator, Christine May, on securing this important members' business debate.

There are several thriving credit unions in my constituency of Glasgow Anniesland. Just over two years ago, I was privileged to be asked to open the new premises of Yoker Credit Union in

Dumbarton Road. It is an impressive and growing operation that illustrates the need for and the positive impact of quality credit unions. Similarly, the commitment and enthusiasm of the staff and board of volunteers at Knightscliffe and Temple Community Credit Union, which is located at Knightswood Cross, was obvious and inspiring when I had the honour of opening its extended premises in 2001.

I take the opportunity to put on the parliamentary record the fact that, last year, the Minister for Communities, Malcolm Chisholm, was good enough to attend the 35th anniversary celebration of Drumchapel Community Credit Union. As some members will know, it holds a special place in the history of the movement in Scotland, as it is widely acknowledged to have been the first credit union in the country. Its founding member and driving force was the late Bert Mullen, who was instrumental in the establishing the Western Credit Union, which was based in the Drumchapel area and was the forerunner of Drumchapel Community Credit Union.

Bert Mullen was typical of the volunteers who can be found in credit unions up and down the country. Their dedication and commitment has enabled the growth in the services and facilities that are available to credit union members. I am proud to represent a constituency in which the credit union movement has achieved such growth and within the boundary of which the movement in Scotland was born. I should also state that Bert Mullen's special place in credit union history, as the first Scottish director of the Credit Union League of Great Britain, was marked on international credit union day on 20 October 2005, when the Nobel peace prize winner John Hume gave the inaugural Bert Mullen lecture.

As Christine May said, credit unions—which provide affordable credit to around 500,000 adults in Britain—are a vital part of the social fabric of many communities throughout Scotland. However, a tough challenge remains: it is estimated that about 7.8 million adults in the United Kingdom who do not have access to affordable credit turn to high-cost lenders—or sharks—for their credit needs. I am sure that the credit union movement will rise to that challenge.

Members will be aware that in some quarters there is an arrogant misconception that credit unions are the poor relation of the financial services industry and that their volunteer base, common bond and strictly not-for-profit structure detract from their ability to innovate and provide up-to-date services for their membership. That fallacy must always be challenged.

I am glad that provision has been made under the credit union assistance fund to develop the marketing of the unique message of the credit

unions. Scottish credit unions are coming up with highly imaginative services that are of benefit to their memberships. For example, the Scottish Transport Credit Union recently launched a new website to provide its members with impartial and unbiased information on pension plans.

I warmly welcome the fact that credit unions are going into schools across the country to encourage young people to save with them. It is important that our young people are aware that there is an alternative to high street banking. They should know that there are places where they can save their money and benefit their local communities at the same time. In seeking to encourage their next generation of members, credit unions are showing the forward-thinking nature of the movement.

I reiterate my support for the motion and for the work of the Scottish Executive in this area. As I said, the three credit unions in my constituency are at the forefront of the regeneration of the communities they serve. I hope that the new services of general economic interest—SGEI—package will help them to continue their work and that it will move the Scottish credit union movement on to the next level.

17:26

Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD): A few years ago, I decided to put my money modestly where my mouth was by joining the Capital Credit Union. I am still a member, or whatever the correct term is. The whole concept of the credit union appeals to me greatly. In fact, I would be happy to be a member of the Co-operative Party, although it might cause slight problems if I were, as the party is somewhat closely linked to the Labour Party. With politics as it is nowadays, my joining up might cause a bit of a schmozzle. I am 100 per cent for the credit union concept. It is good that we are debating the issue. The speeches that have been made thus far have been good.

I approach the subject from the point of view of community regeneration. Although there are other ways of regenerating communities, credit unions are an important tool in that regard. Instead of well-meant, top-down regeneration, credit unions can deliver regeneration from the grass roots up. Helping communities to get a grip on their local affairs and lending money to people who are starting small businesses—as well as lending money to people to help them with their personal affairs—are important aspects of the work of credit unions.

Credit unions are the acceptable face of capitalism. It is to be regretted that not only the loan sharks but the big banks are part of the unacceptable face of capitalism. The big banks

pump out material that serves only to get people further and further into debt and in a manner that I consider to be wicked. I have written and told them that, but they say, "It wisnae me." Whereas the entire banking industry and other business interests push the idea of borrowing money at people—borrowing that they cannot properly sustain or repay—credit unions give people the opportunity to borrow in a sensible manner. They allow capitalism to work in people's favour.

We want to attract good people to run credit unions. The Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator was recently quoted as saying that charitable organisations should not take out insurance policies to protect their directors or board members from claims against them. I am afraid that that could discourage people from taking part in the good work of charities. I do not know whether credit unions are affected by the technicalities of what OSCR said, but we should give the people who run them every possible support and advice, including the start-up assistance to which John Swinney referred.

Credit unions make a huge contribution to our communities. There are many ways in which we can help them—indeed, we could do with more of them scattered about the place. I hope that the minister will carry on the good work that she has obviously done already in widening the scope for credit unions. I hope that, in future, credit unions will be used as a major engine of community regeneration.

17:29

Mark Ballard (Lothians) (Green): Like other members, I congratulate Christine May on bringing the issue of credit unions to the debating chamber.

My interest in credit unions is part of a long-standing commitment to social enterprises. Successful businesses can be about more than money; they can be about people. Indeed, enterprises that have social objectives at their hearts are often the most economically successful businesses. In that context, credit unions have a major role in providing financial services that are driven by the needs of communities. Unlike the high street banks, credit unions work from the bottom up, in a financially sustainable way that is appropriate to local needs.

Many credit unions are active in Scotland, as we have heard. I will take up Christine May's offer and mention a success story in my area. Capital Credit Union, which Donald Gorrie mentioned, was founded in 1989 for local authority employees, but it now offers full banking services to anyone who lives in Lothian and the Borders, irrespective of their financial circumstances. Not just adults but children can benefit from Capital Credit Union's

services. I am a new father, so I was pleased to learn that the credit union recently launched the capital kids savings scheme and that it is working with local primary schools to offer an ethical financial choice to kids, which I hope will be the start of their long engagement with ethical financial services and prudent money management.

Members have acknowledged that credit unions are much more than banks of last resort for the poor. The big banks fail to provide the basic bank accounts that socially excluded people need, and credit unions are stepping forward to fill the gap. However, credit unions' new ability to offer mainstream financial services not just to the socially excluded but to everyone represents a landmark in the development of credit unions.

I will not be satisfied until the loan sharks who prey on the most vulnerable people have been driven from our streets, communities and television screens. Credit unions have a key role to play in offering sustainable financial services that—unlike those offered by many lenders—do not rip people off. However, the exploitative lending practices of other bodies are causing problems for credit unions. As Christine May said, the increasing use of protected trust deeds as an escape route from debt threatens the ability of credit unions to carry on funding. Protected trust deeds protect people who have ludicrous amounts of debt as a result of irresponsible lending. However, responsible lenders such as credit unions are hit by the loss of funds that the protected trust deed system entails. Just when a person most needs a credit union, they can find that it cannot lend to them. Like Christine May, I hope that ministers will listen to the credit union movement and ensure that credit unions are dealt with separately in the Bankruptcy and Diligence etc (Scotland) Bill. That would be a step forward.

Donald Gorrie and others made the wider point that better regulation is needed to deal with loan sharks who advertise their services on television and create ludicrous debt problems for people throughout Scotland. Like Bill Butler, I hope that the new powers for credit unions that the motion celebrates will do more to bring credit unions firmly into the financial mainstream. Indeed, I confidently predict that credit unions will play a key role in the wider financial services sector in Scotland. Credit unions can play a part in ensuring that not just the poor and marginalised but everyone in Scotland has the opportunity to make an ethical financial services choice. Long live credit unions.

17:34

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): I join other members in congratulating my colleague Christine May on securing the debate on credit unions. She

has long supported credit unions, as have many other members.

I will use this opportunity to talk about protected trust deeds—I hope members will forgive me for doing so—but first I will talk about financial exclusion. I will not rehearse the scale of the challenge that we face in ensuring that the poorest people in society have access to an adequate income, affordable credit and the full range of financial products that most people in our communities enjoy. Although more people have bank accounts than ever before, a significant number of people remain without financial products. Needless to say, individual indebtedness remains a persistent problem that we need to tackle because, as many members know, its impact on families is devastating.

I am clear that by tackling financial exclusion, credit unions are part of the solution. They provide access to low-interest loans, help to improve financial literacy and provide a lifeline for many communities. I welcome the extension to the range of services that they can offer, which now includes insurance products, bank accounts and flexible loans. I congratulate the Executive and the Deputy Minister for Communities on their positive work on the issue, which has resulted in growth in the number of credit union members in Scotland.

As members would expect, I pay particular tribute to Vale of Leven Credit Union and Dumbarton Credit Union, which provide a quality service to all sections of my local community. Vale of Leven Credit Union first highlighted the problems with protected trust deeds and was followed soon after by Dumbarton Credit Union, Dalmuir Credit Union, Baillieston Credit Union, Parkhead Credit Union and Capital Credit Union. My postbag and, I am sure, that of other members has been full with correspondence on protected trust deeds. I remind members that the majority of credit unions are small mutual organisations that work in the community to help their members manage their debts. Surpluses are reinvested in the local community.

I will highlight some of the real problems that the sharp increase in the use of protected trust deeds has caused. No credit union is large enough to support the continuous losses that are incurred through non-recovery of loans as a result of protected trust deeds. The system lumps credit unions together with massive creditors such as the Royal Bank of Scotland, HBOS, Visa and MasterCard, all of which are major global players that charge much higher fees than credit unions and—some would argue—much higher interest rates. It is interesting that some trustees charge about £200 an hour to administer trust deeds and that their expenses are paid before creditors see a penny. There are also credibility issues. For

example, some trust deeds allow as legitimate expenses £200 a month for one primary school child to have school lunches—I am interested in knowing what school that is—and £100 a month for dog food. That dog must be very well taken care of. Credit unions suffer disproportionately from losses as a result of protected trust deeds.

I echo the call for the Deputy Minister for Communities to talk to the Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning. I offer three possible solutions. First, we could treat credit unions as we treat the Student Loans Company—in relation to which we have a derogation from European Union competition law—which might enable the Executive to consider the issue differently. Secondly, small community-based credit unions could be ranked above the massive creditors when funds are distributed from protected trust deeds. Finally, if we extended the debt arrangement scheme to include more people, we would reduce the need for protected trust deeds.

17:38

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): I, too, congratulate Christine May. At the risk of upsetting Donald Gorrie, with whom I agreed during his members' business debate last week, I point out that I, too, became a member of Capital Credit Union, to put my money where my mouth was as a member of the Parliament. Incidentally, I have learned to save again, which I have never been terribly good at. Credit union members are encouraged to save their money in the union to build up a pool of funds for other members, which, I am happy to say, is what I have done since I joined the credit union.

There are myths about the membership of credit unions. In late 2004, the Executive carried out research on credit unions, which found out some interesting information. In the survey, 1,591 credit union members responded from 29 Scottish credit unions. The typical member is middle-aged or older, female, white Scottish in ethnic origin, an owner-occupier and in work. That sounds like me and I am not what people think of as the typical credit union member. The survey found that very few members are under 30, from ethnic minority backgrounds, unemployed or permanently sick or disabled. The idea that credit unions are a poor person's bank, besides being derogatory, is simply not borne out in the statistics. Only 14 per cent of respondents were in receipt of a means-tested benefit. That is one myth about credit unions.

Another issue that came out of the survey was that members wanted their unions to offer more ways in which to use the bank, which, of course, is the focus of today's debate. It is a consensual debate and I intend it to remain so, but there are

issues about how much is known about credit unions by the public at large.

I am a practical politician, and I like to do what I call the Asda-Tesco test, which is when I ask people what they know about an issue. If I were to go up to Asda or Tesco shoppers and ask them what they know about the Royal Bank of Scotland, HBOS, the Clydesdale Bank, Lloyds TSB or any of the other big banks, they could tell me something. If I were to ask them, "What is a credit union?", I would find that many people simply do not know. Credit unions may be common in Bill Butler's neck of the woods, but there are parts of Scotland where, if one was to do the supermarket test and ask people, "What is a credit union?", people would be unable to answer. That is a great pity, because the people who would benefit from being in a credit union are the very people who are shopping about. There is an issue there about publicising exactly what a credit union is, what it is not, what it can do and why it is different from the conglomerate of banking services to which Mark Ballard referred. One of the recommendations of the survey was that credit unions should modify and extend their office opening hours and provide pay points for electronic banking. To the best of my knowledge, such services are not available.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am prepared to accept a motion without notice to extend the debate by up to 10 minutes.

Motion moved,

That, under Rule 8.14.3, the debate be extended until 6.00 pm.—[*Christine May.*]

Motion agreed to.

17:41

Mr Charlie Gordon (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab): I am pleased to support the motion and congratulate Christine May on securing the debate. I also congratulate the minister on the measures that are being introduced. I am proud to be a member of the Glasgow City Council Credit Union, which, as the largest in the country, is the daddy of them all.

As members might expect, there is an excellent credit union in the Castlemilk area of my constituency. I salute the role that credit unions play in the financial sector and in tackling social problems such as debt management. I welcome the minister's measures to strengthen credit unions. In Glasgow, that will give further impetus to the role of credit unions in the city's regeneration where, with the support of the city council, some credit unions have expanded from—if members will pardon the expression—hole-and-corner operations to professional organisations with a high street presence.

As has been highlighted, there is one cloud on the horizon: the potential undermining of credit unions by the bad debt of individuals sheltering behind protected trust deeds. Jackie Baillie outlined ways in which that threat might be averted by the actions of the Parliament. The next time our country's economic strategy, "A Smart, Successful Scotland", is refreshed, perhaps Scottish Enterprise will acknowledge the value of credit unions, not just for the social economy but for the real economy.

17:43

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): I congratulate Christine May on securing the debate and declare an interest as a member of the Land o' Burns Credit Union and a council member of the Scottish Agricultural Organisation Society. As a lifelong believer in co-operation and mutuality, on being elected it seemed appropriate that I should join the Land o' Burns Credit Union. I have been a member of that credit union for about six years.

I welcome the fact that more than 179,000 adults in Scotland are members of credit unions and that there is a total of 131 credit unions. Just as important, the assets that the credit unions hold—£185 million—represent significant savings at a time when many people are getting further and further into debt. Many of those who are socially and financially excluded can and do use that type of saving as a first step to saving and using financial products. In that regard, credit unions provide a valuable bridge to a preliminary understanding of the banking and financial services market.

In Ayr, the Land o' Burns Credit Union, based at the John Pollock Centre and led by Rose McLaughlin, is seeking to expand its customer base. I very much support its efforts to attract more members.

Others have alluded to the huge potential of credit unions throughout the country to expand. For that reason, I welcome the replacement of the credit union capacity fund with the credit union assistance fund. I encourage our credit unions to access and use the new fund, particularly with a view to attracting more new and younger members. A lower age profile for our Scottish credit unions would encourage the next generation of savers to make an earlier commitment to saving, which would benefit some of the most disadvantaged people in our communities.

A further advantage is the fact that people are introduced to organised borrowing at affordable rates, which reduces the ambit of the doorstep lenders and loan sharks who operate in our most disadvantaged communities. The credit union assistance fund will also allow credit unions to

diversify their product range and offer more sustainable services and different types of services to their customers. That, too, is to be welcomed.

I welcome Christine May's motion. I do not always agree with her but, in this instance, she has expressed well the positive work and aspirations of credit unions, which are very worthwhile organisations.

17:46

Mr Frank McAveety (Glasgow Shettleston (Lab)): I congratulate Christine May on securing the debate and declare an interest as a Co-operative Party-sponsored member.

Many members have touched on the fundamental issues. We are sending a strong message that the co-operative and mutual philosophy can influence and shape many issues in our country. There is no doubt that, in tackling access to credit, the model that the credit union movement has developed is an example to us all and should be extended as much as possible throughout the country. I never thought that it would be defined as the "daddy of them all", as my colleague Charlie Gordon said. That is an interesting phrase to use, because we are talking about ensuring that, irrespective of people's income, the credit union idea of encouraging a mutual approach can change and underpin the philosophy in poor neighbourhoods and other parts of Scotland. The fact that even John Scott can say that he, a traditional Conservative, supports the mutual model indicates its breadth of appeal. I welcome that conversion and hope that it will extend to others in his party.

John Scott: I hope that Frank McAveety appreciates that it is not a conversion but a lifelong belief in co-operation and mutuality.

Mr McAveety: I concede that and hope that John Scott's proselytising mission can continue, based on his experience.

There are two big challenges. One major piece of research said that the challenge was to stop the stripping of wealth and assets from some of the country's poorest neighbourhoods because of the actions of credit companies. In my constituency, which covers the east end of Glasgow, the BCD—Bridgeton, Calton and Dalmarnock—Credit Union, which is now one of the biggest in the United Kingdom, is doing substantial work. I heard a simple example last week of a £300 loan that was to be repaid at £9 a week. The total interest on that loan from one of the major commercial credit companies was £195; the credit union would have charged less than £11.25, which is a saving of nearly £184 on a single loan of only £300. That shows the scale of the wealth that unsustainable

credit arrangements are taking out of poor neighbourhoods.

The BCD Credit Union is a good example of the new model of credit union that is genuinely thinking about ways of providing its customers with a quality service. It has already undergone a substantial development in that pensions and benefits are now paid directly into more than 500 of its members' accounts. Last week, for the first time, it became able to provide foreign currency. Bulgaria and Poland seem exceptionally popular as destinations this summer, and good credit arrangements can be made available by the BCD Credit Union should members wish to access them.

The formation of the credit union movement throughout Europe, particularly in Ireland, has been touched on. Given the caricature of the east end of Glasgow that is based on the religious divide that has characterised that part of the city for far too long, the partnership between the BCD Credit Union and a credit union in Dublin is amazing. Those credit unions share information, experience and knowledge. That is a great example of that part of Glasgow and that part of Ireland coming together for the benefit of the people who need it most. Hopefully, the more we talk about these things, the more we can demonstrate the benefit of mutual operation.

Challenges remain ahead. I welcome what the Executive and, in particular, the Minister for Communities, have taken on so far in this regard. Hopefully, the debate will encourage further discussion.

I will end by referring to Christine May's speech. My mother used to keep her money hidden in the kettle. We can keep the extended metaphor going to a question that John Swinney and many others have had to face:

"Spout, handle, lid of metal,
what's inside the Singing Kettle?"

We know the answer. If it is a quality credit union, it would probably be the best thing to come out of the Singing Kettle from the kingdom of Fife.

17:50

The Deputy Minister for Communities (Johann Lamont): I will not share with members my family folklore about the Singing Kettle. I just do not want to go there.

It is a privilege for me to wind up the debate, and I welcome the opportunity to highlight the good work of credit unions throughout Scotland. I congratulate Christine May on securing the debate and all members on their speeches, which were worthy of the work that has been done by credit unions and of their significance in our

communities. It is a great privilege for me to have responsibility as a minister for the area of credit unions.

I pay credit to Jackie Baillie who, in the early days of the Parliament, as Minister for Social Justice, drove the credit union agenda and argued for their significance. I also thank those in the credit union movement who have helped shape the policy. It is not something from Government; it has been developed with credit unions and the credit union movement, and it is their work that has allowed us to reach this stage.

I should declare an interest: I love the co-operative movement and the credit union movement. They bring together social commitment, energy and the passion of voluntary activity with the hard-headed, businesslike approach that is required and which has brought great success. The great test of the co-operative movement is its capacity to give practical delivery to ideas, not saying that ideas are woolly and unachievable but going into communities and showing that things can be done—not imposed on communities, but coming from them. I recently had the privilege of visiting the Newarthill Credit Union. It is located in a new building on the main road, built with not one coin of public money but every bit with private and collective endeavour. That speaks to all that is good about the co-operative movement.

Charlie Gordon spoke about co-operation and mutual options and the challenge for our approach to enterprise and the economy. That is precisely why the Executive supported the co-operative development agency and located it inside Scottish Enterprise. The agency is involved in social matters, but it is also about shaping what we define as economic and what works for the economy. That is why I believe there is such strength in it.

I wish to address some points made by individual members before getting into my own contribution to the debate, as I know that people will want them to be responded to. On the Bankruptcy and Diligence etc (Scotland) Bill, we are very much alive to the issues around protected trust deeds. I have already spoken to Allan Wilson, the Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning, about the matter. I know that he is working with and speaking to the credit union movement about it. We are conscious of the significance of the points that have been raised by Jackie Baillie and others. We are happy to continue that dialogue to a resolution.

On the issue of supporting small credit unions in extending their facilities, and touching on the points made by John Swinney about starting up credit unions, in the moneys that have been allocated for the next two years, £100,000 a year

has been specifically identified for that very practical work. I am keen to speak to credit union and other representatives about how such support can be developed. We know that credit unions have the ideas, and we will need to support them in willing the means for their practical delivery.

I acknowledge that the credibility of credit unions is an issue. In my constituency, there is no doubt about the visibility of the local credit union. It was opened in a shopping centre, it looks like a bank and people are using it in increasing numbers. That is a message for us in supporting the credit union movement.

The financial problems that people face can be both a cause and a consequence of poverty, as members have highlighted. Not only might someone be struggling on a lower income, they will have to pay more for the credit that they need. That is simply unjust. We recognise that and it underpins the work that we are trying to do.

When we launched the financial inclusion action plan, 11 per cent of people in Scotland did not have a bank account—with all the consequences of that—and 37 per cent of Scottish households had no savings. That forced them to borrow as the only way they could budget for everyday things such as a washing machine, or even shoes for the kids, but in doing so they had to pay more. A third of low-income families were behind with bills and debt repayments, and they had to deal with all the consequences of that. We know that those individuals and families can benefit from the services that a credit union offers. Those services are not offered only in communities, but where they are, they give local people confidence and understanding. I agree that credit unions are not just for the poor; they are for us all. That sense of mutual support is significant.

As part of our action plan, we have worked to support credit unions and to help them to grow. Our capacity fund, which was launched in 2003, has rewarded 24 successful applicants with a total of £700,000 to help projects throughout the country.

As has been recognised, last year we secured from the European Commission the critical decision that public bodies in Scotland could fund credit unions to provide some basic financial services to their members. That allows credit unions to work with people who are financially excluded. That pioneering and hard-won decision paved the way for making available to credit unions a suite of new services from April this year. Some of those services have been highlighted: they include savings accounts, budgeting accounts, insurance products and flexible credit.

Coping with the unexpected is a challenge for people who are on a low income and, through that

suite of products, credit unions can help such people with managing on a tight budget. Under a credit union budgeting account, a credit union will pay bills on a saver's behalf, which will help people to break the debt cycles that can lead to such damaging financial despair for struggling families.

As well as traditional fixed loan rates, credit unions will be able to offer flexible credit that is linked to the borrower's ability to repay. That may require a loan guarantee fund and offers the opportunity for credit unions to change how they do business. As well as opportunities, a flexible credit union facility presents challenges and risks for credit unions and opens up fresh approaches to how services might be developed.

I think that I mentioned that £400,000 a year will be provided for products and that £100,000 a year will be provided for small grants to cover expenses and I have talked about the challenges ahead.

Christine Grahame: How many people are not aware of credit unions? Given that people are inundated in the afternoons by advertisements for consolidated loan companies that offer high rates, does the Government have a role, or should credit unions be supported, in running advertisements at the same time as those companies purvey consolidated loans, which can take people further into debt?

Johann Lamont: The Government may have a role, but our reaction would be shaped by what the credit union movement does. I agree that a broader issue is financial education and challenging institutions that offer extortionately expensive credit—we are working with the UK Government on that. Financial education is needed in our schools to let our young people know about the sensible choice. One feature of the credit union movement is that it links savings with borrowings and helps people to get a grip on their money.

Christine Grahame's point that people should understand the credit union movement is well made. I would love Scotland to be the same as Ireland, where credit unions are seen on the high street and are the norm. There is a job to be done, which we can discuss further.

Several members referred to the risk of the exposure of credit unions to bad debt. One way in which the service of general economic interest funding can be used is to develop loan guarantee schemes to protect credit unions when a loan is not repaid.

The SGEI approval scheme enables the Executive to approve Scottish credit unions, which will then be eligible to receive public funding for promoting financial inclusion through providing one of the four products. That opens up the

opportunity for credit unions to seek funding for those products not only from the Scottish Executive but from Communities Scotland, local authorities, Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise.

In the past few years, we have made substantial progress on tackling poverty and on tackling financial exclusion and understanding how it is experienced and how we can work with others to challenge it. However, many challenges still face families and individuals who are on low incomes, particularly in the management of their finances. Credit unions play a key role in pursuing and achieving our aim. They have achieved a lot and are going from strength to strength. That means that we are on target to increase credit union membership.

There is scope for us to do even more. I am pleased that we have begun to receive applications for approval to offer SGEI products and I look forward to receiving more. I encourage all credit unions—large and small—to review their policies and products and to think about how they can deliver modern services that meet all their members' needs. I know that the movement will respond to that challenge and that, as in the past, it will engage with every level of government on shaping the policy that will determine how we address the key challenges of financial exclusion, which the poorest and most vulnerable in our communities experience so sorely.

Meeting closed at 18:00.

Members who would like a printed copy of the *Official Report* to be forwarded to them should give notice at the Document Supply Centre.

No proofs of the *Official Report* can be supplied. Members who want to suggest corrections for the archive edition should mark them clearly in the daily edition, and send it to the Official Report, Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh EH99 1SP. Suggested corrections in any other form cannot be accepted.

The deadline for corrections to this edition is:

Wednesday 17 May 2006

PRICES AND SUBSCRIPTION RATES

OFFICIAL REPORT daily editions

Single copies: £5.00

Meetings of the Parliament annual subscriptions: £350.00

The archive edition of the *Official Report* of meetings of the Parliament, written answers and public meetings of committees will be published on CD-ROM.

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS weekly compilation

Single copies: £3.75

Annual subscriptions: £150.00

Standing orders will be accepted at Document Supply.

Published in Edinburgh by Astron and available from:

Blackwell's Bookshop
53 South Bridge
Edinburgh EH1 1YS
0131 622 8222

Blackwell's Bookshops:
243-244 High Holborn
London WC1 7DZ
Tel 020 7831 9501

All trade orders for Scottish Parliament documents should be placed through Blackwell's Edinburgh

Blackwell's Scottish Parliament Documentation
Helpline may be able to assist with additional information on publications of or about the Scottish Parliament, their availability and cost:

Telephone orders and inquiries
0131 622 8283 or
0131 622 8258

Fax orders
0131 557 8149

E-mail orders
business.edinburgh@blackwell.co.uk

Subscriptions & Standing Orders
business.edinburgh@blackwell.co.uk

RNID Ttypetalk calls welcome on
18001 0131 348 5412
Textphone 0845 270 0152

sp.info@scottish.parliament.uk

All documents are available on the Scottish Parliament website at:

www.scottish.parliament.uk

Accredited Agents
(see Yellow Pages)

and through good booksellers

Printed in Scotland by Astron