

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Thursday 21 December 2006

Session 2

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Scottish Parliament

Thursday 21 December 2006

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

Trident

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): Good morning. The first item of business is a debate on motion S2M-5355, in the name of Nicola Sturgeon, on Trident.

09:15

Nicola Sturgeon (Glasgow) (SNP): A recent opinion poll asked people in Scotland whether they thought that this Parliament should have the power to decide whether nuclear weapons remained on the Clyde, and 61 per cent said yes. Unfortunately, we do not yet have that power, but we have the opportunity today to make our voice heard. We can speak on behalf of the vast majority of people in Scotland who oppose the replacement of the Trident nuclear system. I ask MSPs in all parties who have honourably opposed Trident over many years to vote today with their conscience; I ask for all of us to say loudly and clearly to the United Kingdom Government, "Think again."

I will set out the case against Trident renewal, which is first and foremost a moral case. Each and every Trident warhead is a weapon of mass destruction in its own right. The detonation of just one would kill more than 200,000 people. Trident is morally indefensible. A Prime Minister who took this country into an illegal war in search of weapons of mass destruction that did not even exist should, if there was a shred of principle or consistency in his arguments, understand that better than anyone.

The case against Trident is not just moral; it is also about how to make this world of ours a safer place to live in. We live in uncertain times, but the replacement of Trident risks making the world more dangerous, not less. It will not help the process of disarmament and non-proliferation; it will hinder that process.

There are those, including the First Minister, who have tried to characterise the debate as a choice between multilateral and unilateral disarmament. In their world, those who back a new Trident just want to have something to bargain away; in their view, the rest of us would give up something for nothing. I would say simply this: read the white paper carefully. It is not a route map to disarmament. On the contrary, it seeks to defend nuclear weapons in principle. It makes the

case for keeping them in the UK for the next 50 years. Perhaps worst of all, it does not rule out a first-strike nuclear attack. That is why we must oppose the proposals in the white paper.

The white paper's central premise is that a country is safer with nuclear weapons than without. That argument is fundamentally wrong. Eight countries in the world have nuclear weapons; 180 do not—and they are no less safe because of it. Being nuclear free is the international norm, and we should be striving to make it even more so and to make Scotland normal in that regard. However, the argument is not just wrong but is inherently dangerous. It provides a rationale for any other country that is trying to justify having nuclear weapons of its own.

Tony Blair says in the white paper that nuclear weapons are

"the ultimate assurance of our national security."

But every Government wants to protect its country's national security, and rogue Governments will always use national security as an excuse to do whatever they want to do. There is absolutely nothing to stop any of them using Tony Blair's argument to justify developing nuclear weapons of their own. In truth, many of them will use that argument and the end result will be not disarmament, but an acceleration of the nuclear arms race. That is why anyone who genuinely believes in reducing the nuclear threat in our world must oppose the proposals in the white paper.

It is not just the logic of the Government's argument that would make the world a much more dangerous place to live in, but its sheer and blatant hypocrisy. It is hypocrisy for the United Kingdom to maintain a nuclear deterrent while arguing that other countries should not develop one. That hypocrisy is deeply damaging in today's world and rides roughshod over the non-proliferation treaty.

This may come as news to Tony Blair and the supporters of a new Trident, but that treaty does not give the privileged nuclear club carte blanche to do whatever it likes. That treaty was a bargain. Countries that did not have nuclear weapons promised not to develop them and in return the five nuclear states, including the UK, promised that they would negotiate in good faith to achieve disarmament. That was the quid pro quo. Replacing Trident would be a breach of our side of that bargain, which would make it much more difficult to persuade others to keep theirs.

Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con): Over recent years, the UK has given up air, ground and operational theatre nuclear weapons. What effect has that had on other countries that are still intent on developing them?

Nicola Sturgeon: The idea that the UK has had nuclear disarmament in recent years does not hold water. In the white paper, Tony Blair says that he wants to reduce warheads by 20 per cent, but if we read the small print we find that the number of warheads that will remain deployed at sea will stay the same. It is the warheads that are already in reserve that we are going to get rid of. It is double-speak and it is spin. Trident makes this world a more dangerous place.

The key questions are these: for what and at what cost? Like my colleagues in the Scottish National Party, I have always been opposed to nuclear weapons, but at least, during the cold war, they had some sort of rationale. We knew who they were pointed at and what they were designed to deter. The threats in today's world are entirely different. Nuclear weapons will not deter suicide bombers. In an uncertain world, where would Trident be targeted? That question, which was posed by Jim Wallace only two weeks ago, has still not been answered. The suspicion lingers that the decision to replace Trident is more about building monuments to Tony Blair than it is about national security. If we do not speak out now, we will all pay a heavy price for it; £25 billion is a conservative estimate of the financial cost. I, for one, would rather see that money spent on health, education and pensions, and on ensuring decent conditions and equipment for our conventional forces, which have been badly let down by this Government.

For all those reasons, I believe that the proposals in the white paper must be opposed. This is our chance as a Parliament—as the Scottish Parliament—to speak up for common sense. I urge all members to seize that opportunity today.

I move,

That the Parliament notes the publication by the UK Government of its White Paper on the future of the Trident nuclear missile system on Monday 4 December 2006; recognises the need for a full debate to explore the military, economic and political consequences of Trident renewal and believes that a convincing case can be made, in military, economic and political terms, for the non-replacement of Trident, and calls on the UK Government not to go ahead at this time with the proposal in the White Paper.

09:23

Maureen Macmillan (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): I welcome the debate initiated by the UK Government on the future of Trident. This is the first time that a Government has called for a national debate on the independent nuclear deterrent and I hope that many people throughout the country will take part in it and will contact their Westminster MP to make their views known. After all, in spite of what the SNP would like us to

believe, the UK Government will make the decision on Trident.

Nicola Sturgeon: Will the member take an intervention?

Maureen Macmillan: No.

This should be a debate not about the constitution, but about Trident. The UK Government will make the decision on Trident in due course, and Scotland is ably represented by MPs who will take part in that decision. They will have to consider our national defence needs and our international obligations in the light of changing world circumstances.

The argument is about whether our defence needs can be met without having an independent nuclear deterrent. My belief is that an independent nuclear deterrent is not necessary and I would argue for no renewal of Trident. I did not believe in its necessity during the cold war, when we had mutually assured destruction and worried about nuclear winter rather than climate change, and I believe less in it now. For starters, I do not know whom we would aim it at, and the consequences of using it cannot be contemplated.

Possibly uniquely among MSPs, I have visited the sites in Hiroshima and Nagasaki where the nuclear bombs were dropped 60 years ago. Those desolate places are moving and compelling. They consist of flat, empty acres within crowded Japanese cities. There are some statues, portraying the theme of peace, gifted by other countries. There are strings of little origami cranes—the symbol of peace and good luck—hung by schoolchildren, and the trees are full of black crows scavenging for food that visitors might drop. The ruins of the Catholic cathedral at the epicentre of the bomb site at Nagasaki are a stark warning to us. In the museums in both cities, there are photographs and melted artefacts associated with the bombs.

We all know that nuclear warfare is not like conventional bombing. The radioactive effects last for generations in people, animals and plants. That is why we must strive, as the amendment in my name says, for

“a world without nuclear weapons”.

That will not be easy to achieve. New countries aspire to become nuclear powers.

Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP): Maureen Macmillan makes the point that we are supposed to be having a debate. What does she think the chances are that, at the end of that debate, Tony Blair and his Government will agree to get rid of nuclear weapons?

Maureen Macmillan: I will come to that in a minute, if Alex Neil does not mind. I want to talk

first about our opportunities to influence the debate.

We must use the opportunity to engage internationally with other nuclear powers at every level to bring about a reduction in nuclear weapons. Like Joan Ruddock, I believe that we now have a large window of opportunity to do that. The first decision that the Government will make will be on the commissioning of new submarines, but the decision on the new warheads will not be made until after the next UK election. That gives us months, if not years, to engage with the European Union, the United Nations, the G8 and NATO with a view to reducing warheads worldwide and with our missiles thrown into the bargaining pool.

However, I am concerned that the Scottish National Party wishes to withdraw Scotland from NATO. SNP members say that they do not wish to be beholden to the American bomb for their defence. That, of course, would not save them from nuclear fallout if there was a nuclear war, because it is no respecter of boundaries. The SNP policy of leaving NATO would have serious repercussions for Scotland. Angus Robertson, the MP for Moray, has complained that there might be a delay in getting the promised new fighter plane for the Moray air bases, but if Scotland leaves NATO there will be no new planes. Perhaps Richard Lochhead will tell us how many civilian jobs would be left in Kinloss and Lossiemouth in his constituency if SNP policy were to be followed.

Over the next few months, Trident's future will be debated thoroughly. Nobody in the Parliament wants nuclear weapons to be used, but we do not all agree on the best way to prevent their use. The argument lies in how best to prevent nuclear war and how best to safeguard our country.

I move amendment S2M-5355.5, to leave out from "the publication" to end and insert:

"that the UK Government has initiated a debate on the future of the independent nuclear deterrent force and urges everyone in Scotland to take part in it; recognises that the decisions on national defence are rightly reserved to Westminster; considers that any government has a primary duty to protect the security of its people and that this includes a credible policy on national defence and international security; believes in a shared objective of a world without nuclear weapons and supports further reductions in the global nuclear arsenal; further believes that, in seeking a world free from nuclear weapons, we should utilise and develop our international engagement at every level including at the EU, the United Nations including the UK's seat on the Security Council, NATO and the G8; notes with concern the plans of the SNP to take Scotland out of the collective security arrangements of the UK and NATO and to establish separate armed forces for Scotland with greatly diminished capabilities either to contribute to international peacekeeping operations or even to defend Scottish interests, and rejects those policies on the grounds that they would threaten the security of Scotland, diminish our armed forces and destroy jobs."

09:29

Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con): Nicola Sturgeon referred to an opinion poll. The opinion polls at the last general election were clear: they backed Labour, which in its manifesto promised the retention of nuclear weaponry. Those are the elections that count and, as we already know, opinion polls mean little.

Given that Nicola Sturgeon has concentrated on Trident in recent First Minister's question times and the fact that there was a recent debate in the chamber, will she tell me why we are debating it again? I recognise the importance of the Government's document and its wish to have a wider debate. I welcome that, as the amendment in my name suggests.

Nicola Sturgeon: Will the member give way?

Sarah Boyack (Edinburgh Central) (Lab): Will the member give way?

Phil Gallie: I give way to Nicola Sturgeon.

Nicola Sturgeon: We are having the debate because it deals with a vital issue for people in Scotland—let us remember that Trident is based in Scotland. Furthermore, I remind Phil Gallie that the First Minister has called for everyone to take part in the debate.

If this is a genuine debate, can the member cast light on the fact that, on 7 December, Tony Blair wrote to George Bush that the Government had already decided to take part in the planned life extension of the Trident missile system? Does that not give the lie to Tony Blair's position?

Phil Gallie: Tony Blair's position is his. I have defended his position in the past, and I have done so wrongly. I believe that he lied to the country on a particular issue, so I am not here to defend Tony Blair.

I remember Nicola Sturgeon's SNP colleagues turning out in force at Westminster to campaign to retain the nuclear submarines at Rosyth dockyard. I believe that the Conservative Government at the time took a flawed decision, but the SNP was out in force to retain those nuclear submarines. At one end of the argument or the other, there is a degree of hypocrisy.

Nicola Sturgeon spoke of issues that are important to Scotland. I agree, but health, education and justice are important too, and in recent times the SNP has not seemed prepared to debate them in the chamber when it has had the opportunity to do so. Nicola Sturgeon should consider that when she is thinking about the interests of Scotland.

Our amendment takes up two thirds—in volume at least—of the SNP's position. We welcome the debate and we probably have our own fixed views,

but it is right in a democratic society that those fixed views should be challenged. That is what the debate is all about, and that is no doubt what Tony Blair envisages.

I turn to the Liberal amendment. The debate is another opportunity for the Liberals to sit on the fence. The white paper comments on the lifetime of the Vanguard submarines—do they challenge that?

Mr Jim Wallace (Orkney) (LD): Yes.

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

Phil Gallie: Are they saying that the submarines will be okay after 20 years? Are they prepared—

Mike Rumbles: Will the member give way?

Phil Gallie: No; the Liberals will have their say in a minute. They can answer then.

Are the Liberals prepared to put the lives of submariners at risk in 20 years or so by sending them to sea in out-of-date submarines that are not capable of doing the job? Do they have a wonderful vision of what the world will be like in 20 to 50 years' time? Are they prepared to put at risk the lives of people in this country by abandoning what I believe to be a successful nuclear deterrent? I do not have time to go into all my reasoning, so I point members to the debate that we had just a couple of months ago when I explained in some detail my support for the retention of nuclear deterrents.

There is much that I can agree with in the Labour amendment. However, when Labour members talk about our armed services, they ignore the fact that the Labour Government has caused massive damage to our conventional armed services. It has done that in Scotland with its abandonment of the Scottish regiments, and it has done it overseas with its overcommitment of our forces and underprovision of weapons, personal armoury and rest and training for our troops.

The Labour amendment falls short when it refers to our conventional forces. However, I go along with Labour in welcoming the debate again and on the overall objective of reducing nuclear weaponry worldwide. Sadly, I do not believe that nuclear weapons can be disinvented, although I wish that they could be. As long as they exist, we cannot turn our backs on them.

I move amendment S2M-5355.2, to leave out from "and believes" to end.

09:35

Mr Jim Wallace (Orkney) (LD): It is useful for the Parliament to have the opportunity to

contribute to the debate, although the decision is properly taken by the people whom we elect to Westminster. I have some reservations about calling it a debate when only the fifth paragraph of the Prime Minister's foreword to the white paper says:

"We have therefore decided to maintain our deterrent system beyond the life of the Vanguards with a new generation of ballistic missile-carrying submarines. We will also extend the life of the Trident D5 missile."

I do not call that a genuine consultation.

The Liberal Democrat position, as set out in our amendment, is that we reject the reasoning in the white paper that we must rush to a decision in spring next year. We have argued a cogent case that crucial decisions on whether and how to procure a successor system to Trident need not be taken before 2014, when a clearer picture could have emerged of the proliferation of states that possess nuclear weapons and their ability to threaten directly Britain's security.

We are not alone in making the case for deferral. In June, the House of Commons Defence Committee concluded that a programme to extend the lifetime of the four Vanguard-class submarines would make it unnecessary to take a binding decision on a replacement for Trident until some time between 2010 and 2014—in other words, beyond the next UK general election, when the issue can be debated before the electorate.

So why the rush? I believe that technical procurement arguments call into question the Government's haste. The most recent Vanguard submarine entered service less than six years ago. With a design life of 25 years, to which an extension of five years is possible, such submarines could operate until the late 2020s. Moreover, the House of Commons committee has said that the United States' decision to keep the Trident missile in service until 2042 means that that cannot be said to be a driver in the present debate.

There are substantial reasons why we should reconsider our reliance on the strategic ballistic nuclear missile system, which was ordered when the cold war was particularly chilly. The international strategic scene has changed out of recognition from the world of the 1980s. Successive UK Cabinet ministers alert us to the terrorist threat but, with barely an exception, those who gave evidence to the Commons Defence Committee's inquiry took the view that a strategic nuclear defence system would

"serve no useful or practical purpose in countering this kind of threat."

General Sir Michael Jackson voiced support for the Government's Trident announcement in his recent Dimpleby lecture, but he deplored the lack

of resources for soldiers' accommodation and basic fighting equipment. Yet the procurement costs for retaining our independent deterrent are estimated at £15 billion to £20 billion—more than the cost of procuring Trident at today's prices.

I was a member of the Liberal-SDP Defence Commission in 1986, which said, in respect of the original Trident procurement:

"a compelling argument against continuing with the Trident project is that of defence priorities and resources. Trident will account for at least 6% of the equipment budget during the period of its acquisition ... at a time when the defence budget as a whole is severely overstretched."

Those words have an echo of today. If that was true 20 years ago, the argument is possibly even more compelling today.

However, we need a reality check. Six Christmases ago, no one envisaged the dreadful events of 11 September 2001 and how they would change the international strategic environment. Few today would be so bold as to identify with any certainty what future threats the United Kingdom is likely to face. North Korea recently tested a nuclear weapon and Iran continues a programme of uranium enrichment, in contravention of a Security Council resolution. Their activities could trigger a course of nuclear proliferation that would change materially today's strategic equation. That is why my party has not advocated unilateral renunciation of our existing deterrent. I respect but disagree with those who argue the unilateralist position. However, with such uncertainty, I ask why we must decide to commit to replacement before we need to do so. We know that once things start rolling, they will continue.

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

Mr Wallace: I am in the last minute of my speech, so I will conclude.

The threat of proliferation should prompt us to make a renewed effort to breathe life into the non-proliferation treaty and non-proliferation in practice. Britain should make an active contribution to supporting non-proliferation and kick-starting multilateral disarmament talks. That is why the Liberal Democrats have proposed going much further than the Government's intended 20 per cent reduction in the number of warheads. Our proposals would cut in half Britain's stockpile of nuclear weapons now and send a strong signal to the international community that nuclear disarmament must be back on the agenda.

All members believe that a nuclear weapons-free world would be a precious prize. I fear that the headlong rush next spring to a new generation of British nuclear deterrence would make that goal ever more distant. The prize is surely worthy of a debate more serious and genuine than the fait

accompli that has been presented to us and the rush to replacement that was announced in the white paper earlier this month. I urge members to support the Liberal Democrat amendment in my name.

I move amendment S2M-5355.3, to leave out from "notes" to end and insert:

"rejects the case made by the UK Government in its White Paper on the future of the Trident nuclear missile system published on 4 December 2006 that the decision on a replacement for Trident needs to be made in early 2007 and calls on the UK Government not to go ahead with the proposals in the White Paper at this time."

The Presiding Officer: We move to open debate. As members are aware, time is tight, therefore speeches will be limited to four minutes.

09:40

Roseanna Cunningham (Perth) (SNP): It is less than three months since we last debated Trident in the Parliament. In September we were debating in anticipation of a Government decision on renewal. Today's debate is taking place in the context of a white paper that clearly signposts the Government's intentions and of the desperate need for a debate throughout the UK on the need for Trident to be replaced. None of the sentiments that I expressed in the debate on 28 September are inappropriate in this debate, so I hope that all members will take those comments as read.

I endorse everything that Nicola Sturgeon said in her opening remarks, but I might have been slightly more scathing about what I see as an international example of men with mid-life crises worrying about whether theirs is bigger than the others'. Today I want to look at a slightly different issue. I hope that all members have read the most recent publication by Greenpeace, which makes a very telling point. It highlights the narrow definition of national security that is always referred to in debates such as this. Perhaps the concept of national security should be subjected to rather more detailed scrutiny than it is usually given.

For various reasons, including the global stand-off between the west and the communist world and the various targeting strategies of the principal players, during the cold war it might have seemed obvious what national security meant for us, although I think that that was debatable even then. However, what does it mean now? No one can answer that question. In a much-publicised war on terror, it is not easy to see what the nuclear strategy is, other than to try to ensure that nuclear weapons do not fall into the hands of those who may misuse them. That involves value judgments about which are right and proper regimes to have their fingers on the buttons and which are not, and cannot address the issue of the weapons' possible use by individuals or terrorist cells.

Recently, debate has centred on what even some authorities in the United States argue is the major challenge to world security—the threat of climate change. How do either of the changed realities in which we live mesh with the intention to move to a new generation of nuclear weapons? How do either of them justify spending what on some estimates may amount to £76 billion, if they are not the basis of our definition of national security?

The dangerous perception is that the continued brandishing of nuclear weapons will really be about access to resources in the future, with the rich west and its client states relying on such weapons as the big stick by which to ensure that scarce resources remain available to the west. What is happening in the middle east could be well described as oil wars, with the USA's main interest being in a continued supply of oil, instead of in addressing the issue of scarcity of non-renewable resources. In that context, nuclear weapons become a way of ignoring the reality of climate change or, at least, of allowing the west to ignore that reality.

If we accept that climate change is a threat that we will all have to face, what are we doing to address it? We know that that will cost money. Why, at a time when we are facing a cost that we all recognise will need to be borne, do we appear to have up to £76 billion available for this dubious deterrent?

Maureen Macmillan told us that the Labour Government is calling for a national debate, but she went on to express the view that that debate should take place within the walls of the House of Commons. I can tell her from experience that that kind of national debate is no debate at all. It is only right and proper that the Parliament should make a contribution to the debate and, more to the point, should encourage a debate throughout Scotland. Ultimately, members either believe that it is okay to have weapons of mass destruction or they do not. If they do not, they should vote with the SNP at 5 pm.

09:44

Christine May (Central Fife) (Lab): Phil Gallie wonders why we are having this debate—I think we know why. We are having it for reasons of avoidance. We are avoiding a debate on any aspect of SNP policy on matters that are within the competence of the Scottish Parliament. Are we surprised? No, we are not.

Let us consider for a moment some recent SNP pronouncements on the economy and fiscal policy, which are needed to create a stable defence policy. The SNP assumes that we will have 95 per cent of oil revenues, which would leave Scotland

in absolute surplus. I am sorry, but it would not. Alex Salmond said that there would be no tax rises. Oh, I am sorry—he meant no income tax rises.

Ms Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Is not the member supposed to address the motion?

The Presiding Officer: She clearly linked energy and revenues to the defence budget. Her speech is in order.

Christine May: Thank you.

On local government, the SNP proposes a freeze on council tax. I am sorry, but it is questionable whether that is even legally possible. When that problem was exposed, what did the SNP do? To its shame, it blamed the Scottish Parliament information centre.

Proposed student funds have been exposed as having a cost of £1.7 billion and nowhere—

The Presiding Officer: That is getting a little wide.

Christine May: Nowhere is any coherent case made for a stable long-term funding policy for all that, including for any defence policy. The SNP wants to talk about defence policy.

Alex Neil: Will the member give way?

Christine May: No.

Defence policy is properly the responsibility of SNP members at Westminster. My party uses its Westminster members to reflect our views on such matters and to lead the debate. It is illuminating that the debate is being held here because of how little impact the ineffectual and confused whingeing of the SNP's members in Westminster is having.

This is a serious debate and we all know the end that we want to achieve, which is a world that is free of nuclear weapons. That would be a perfect solution.

Ms Rosemary Byrne (South of Scotland) (Sol): Will the member give way?

Christine May: No.

As Martin Kettle pointed out in last Saturday's edition of *The Guardian*—I recommend that my SNP colleagues listen to this—

"It is smug and dishonest to expect politicians to inhabit a different moral universe to the imperfect one the rest of us live in".

He went on to say:

"As a society, we seem to be living through a collective suspension of seriousness about how politics and government should be carried out in modern Britain ... We wish for the end, but persistently ignore the means ... It is

too easy to brush aside the complex web of practical issues as if they are of no account."

That is what is happening here. As Maureen Macmillan said, we are to have a consultation. We can argue over timing, but we have to welcome that opportunity.

Jim Wallace's elegant and loquacious exposition of Liberal Democrat policy was consistent. As somebody else said recently, that party is, as always, sitting on the fence—that is what it does.

I want to consider the 17 companies in Fife, many of which are in my constituency, that are involved in the defence industry and in aspects of the nuclear industry. I want to consider our place on the global stage and come up with a balanced defence policy that takes account of the various elements. I want to think about those staff in Glenrothes and Dunfermline and about the impact on the Scottish and UK economies of any defence policy. That is why I will support our amendment and will participate in the consultation.

09:49

Chris Ballance (South of Scotland) (Green): I will return to the subject of the debate.

"There is today no direct military threat to the United Kingdom or to Western Europe. Nor do we foresee the re-emergence of such a threat ... The Strategic Defence Review has conducted a re-examination of our deterrence requirements. This does not depend on the size of other nations' arsenals but on the minimum necessary to deter any threat to our vital interests."

That was the UK strategic defence review reporting in 1998. What has changed since then? Nothing.

In August 2005 at Hiroshima, Kofi Annan said:

"We are witnessing continued efforts to strengthen and modernise nuclear arsenals. Without concerted action, we may face a cascade of nuclear proliferation."

On which side do we stand? Do we stand with those who are working hard to encourage multilateral or unilateral disarmament or with those who are rushing headlong into that "cascade"? On which side do we want Britain to be?

Dr Hans Blix, the United Nations weapons inspector, said in London in November that modernising Britain's arsenal would put the nuclear non-proliferation treaty under strain and would increase the feeling among non-nuclear states such as Iran that they are being cheated by the nuclear powers. He pointed out the "strong sense of frustration" at the way in which nuclear nations are in the process of developing new types of weapons rather than moving towards their treaty commitments.

The last time Hans Blix spoke, Tony Blair ignored him—there were no weapons of mass

destruction in Iraq and international weapons inspections and control had succeeded. Tony Blair was wrong then and he is wrong now. When Tony Blair called for Labour back benchers to follow him into Iraq, they believed him; they trusted that he had information that he could not disclose, but they discovered that he had nothing. That mistake has cost them hundreds, if not thousands, of members and thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, of votes. Will they follow him into the desert again, or will they stand up this time for their consciences, for what they know is right, for what they know the people of Scotland want and for what the Church of Scotland and the Catholic church have called for? Will they support the anti-Trident motions and amendments tonight—even if it means voting for the Liberal Democrat lowest-common-denominator amendment?

This is a conscience issue. It is the supreme conscience issue and it transcends party politics. I am optimistic that we will get rid of weapons of mass destruction. We might not win the vote in Westminster in March, where an undemocratic voting system maintains the stranglehold of the old parties, but that vote will mark not the end but the beginning of the campaign against Trident's replacement.

The white paper makes it clear that very little expenditure will be incurred for at least five years from now and that the main expenditure will not be incurred until after 2020. The campaign against Trident and son of Trident will continue over the next 13 years—more if necessary—because the world has two possible futures: one in which we move to disarmament and to policing the world to ensure that nations do not have or achieve nuclear capability, and another in which more and more nations go nuclear until an accident or dictator starts a disastrous nuclear war.

09:53

Colin Fox (Lothians) (SSP): Like other members, I welcome the debate, which should be raging throughout Britain. The full implications of developing yet more weapons of mass destruction should be engaging all civic and democratic institutions, because the matter affects us all. The issues that are involved are huge issues of our age. Our having more weapons of mass destruction would put all humanity at risk. The debate is one in which the illegality of nuclear weapons under international law is exposed; in which doubt is cast on Britain's commitment to the nuclear non-proliferation treaties that it has signed; and in which the fact is exposed that enormous sums of money that could be spent on health, education and social services are to go on nuclear bombs.

It is precisely in relation to issues of international legality and concern for humanity that Tony Blair does not shine—after all, his legacy of the catastrophic failure of policy in Iraq will hang around his neck for ever more. We are not surprised at his attempt to steamroller the debate because, as others have said, his Cabinet has already decided; his Chancellor of the Exchequer has already allocated the funds and his First Minister has already jumped into line. His appeal for a full and open debate is, unfortunately, another sham.

On 12 June this year, I visited Aldermaston Atomic Weapons Establishment as part of a Scottish Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament deputation. We were taken round the perimeter fence of the base by CND activists, because the weapons establishment management would not meet us. We were shown where nuclear warheads are manufactured and where the replacement Trident system is being developed—its development is already far advanced. In the afternoon, we travelled to Westminster, where we met the former United Nations weapons inspector, Dr Hans Blix, who was in London to present his latest report on the nuclear non-proliferation treaty and on how the countries that had signed up to it were not honouring their commitments. That evening, Gordon Brown announced in his Mansion House speech that he had already allocated the £25 billion that is needed to replace Trident. That is the background to the debate.

The majority of Scots have already expressed their opinions on Trident—they are opposed to it and they believe that Scotland will be less safe as a consequence of what is proposed. I have no doubt that an independent Scotland would scrap Trident, just as it would not have sent Scottish troops to fight an illegal war in Iraq.

One can understand the feelings of the international community. The world wants to know who will protect the world from Kim Jong-Blair, who has weapons of mass destruction and form in attacking and invading countries such as Iraq.

As far as Britain is concerned, the nuclear non-proliferation treaty will, in effect, be shredded by Tony Blair's decision in a white paper. I am reminded of what the Greek philosopher Anacharsis said:

"Laws are like cobwebs—strong enough to detain only the weak, and too weak to hold the strong."

The nuclear non-proliferation treaty is apparently meant to hold back small nations—North Korea notwithstanding—but the reality is that big and powerful nuclear nations do not take a blind bit of notice of it.

Trust in politics has never been in shorter supply and Labour simply cannot be trusted on Trident.

On 19 June 1984, Gordon Blair—that was a Freudian slip; I meant Gordon Brown—said that Trident was

"unacceptably expensive, economically wasteful and militarily unsound".

He is now all for such weapons. Brown and Blair have shown the same inconsistency. They are a pair of maverick warmongering leaders whose actions compare with any turnaround Kim Jong-il ever made.

Scottish CND has invited parliamentarians to join it on 8 January as part of a year-long protest outside Faslane naval base. I will be there. I hope that all members of the Scottish Parliament will, too.

09:57

Mr Kenny MacAskill (Lothians) (SNP): There are two aspects to the debate. There is the substantive topic that we are debating—the principles and morality behind our having nuclear weapons—and the opportunity that the debate offers to portray a proper image of Parliament to the wider world.

The arguments in the substantive debate—that there is no military, economic or moral case for Trident or for replacing it—have been well made by my colleagues and other members. The eye-for-an-eye principle that has come down through the centuries would simply make the whole world blind. That principle has been continued in the nonsense of mutually assured destruction—or MAD, to use the acronym. The principle has not worked in years gone by and will not work in the 21st century. We must jettison it and move towards unilateral nuclear disarmament.

Phil Gallie: Will the member take an intervention?

Mr MacAskill: Not at the moment.

The debate is an important opportunity for Parliament. We acknowledged that we had to raise our game when we moved into the new chamber. Members understood that Parliament had failed to deliver on the aspirations and hopes of the people of Scotland.

As Maureen Macmillan correctly said, when it comes to foreign policy, never mind military matters, Parliament's powers are limited. However, it is the only elected chamber in Scotland in which we can come together and give the people of Scotland a democratic voice. The opportunities that this debate provides seldom come to institutions such as Parliament. We have an opportunity not only to reaffirm our opposition to nuclear weapons and to say that there is no military, moral or economic case for them, but to rise to the occasion and ensure that Scotland

speaks with one voice. Whether or not we can bring about legislative change, we have been elected to Parliament and we should make the moral case that there is no basis for nuclear weapons.

I was rather gobsmacked by what Christine May said. She quoted what was said in the *Financial Times*—or somewhere else—about living in an immoral world, the logic of which would appear to be that, if you live in an immoral world, you should simply abandon morality.

Christine May: Will the member give way?

Mr MacAskill: I am not prepared to give way because of the shortage of time.

We have fundamental values that we must adhere to—values that have in recent years been impinged upon by Blair. Over recent months, we have seen one of the values to which we adhere—that of not wishing to see destruction wreaked elsewhere—impinged upon through munitions flights to Israel that saw devastation taken to and levied on the Lebanon. We opposed that. In this debate, we have an opportunity to state our position on a bigger issue than the wrong that has been perpetrated by Israel in the Lebanon: we can speak as one on the whole concept of mutually assured destruction. The opportunity for Parliament is not just in the substance of the debate and what we say in opposing nuclear weapons, but in that we should rise to the occasion. To use the First Minister's words, we need to "raise our game."

We need to speak for the values and beliefs of the people of Scotland, the crux of which is that they do not want Trident. The people of Scotland have expressed that view in opinion polls, demonstrations and at the ballot box. The duty of all those who adhere to those values is to vote for the non-replacement of Trident at decision time. We need no warmongering or backsliding; members must stand up for their values and principles and for those of the people of Scotland. If we do not do that, we will have let an historic opportunity for the Scottish Parliament pass us by. We will have forsaken the opportunity for Scotland, through its elected representatives, to say in the debate that we oppose Trident and we will not see its replacement brought to Scotland. We are at an important juncture: there must be no backsliding. At 5 o'clock, Parliament must speak as one and say no to Trident.

10:01

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): We have had as many as four debates on the subject of Trident in as many months. As ever, the consequence is that more heat than light is generated. As I did in previous debates, I reflect

that, if the SNP cared so much about the issue, it should allocate more than one hour and 15 minutes to the subject, as it has done today. I regret that the debate is more about a cheap political headline than it is about genuine debate.

At the start of her speech, Nicola Sturgeon quoted from a survey. I listened carefully to what she said, so I will share the results of another survey with her. In a survey by the Electoral Commission, almost two thirds of people said that they wished—passionately wished—that the Scottish Parliament would stick to talking about the areas for which it has responsibility.

Nicola Sturgeon: Will the member take an intervention?

Jackie Baillie: Will the member just hold on a minute?

The SNP needs to be a bit less disingenuous. MPs at Westminster will decide the issue—the 59 MPs who were elected to represent Scotland. Those MPs, six of whom are from the SNP, have responsibility for the decision. So what have the feeble six been up to?

Nicola Sturgeon: In 1999, CND conducted a survey to which Jackie Baillie contributed. In a letter that she sent to the CND, she said that "no additional Trident missile bodies" should be bought. In the survey, she said that "Trident should be decommissioned". Should we not have a bit of honesty from Jackie Baillie?

Jackie Baillie: Absolutely. When Nicola Sturgeon tried to tout that round the press last week, no one picked up on it. What I said is entirely consistent with a multilateral position. If Nicola Sturgeon had been honest enough to read further from my letter, Parliament would have heard that what I said was that the issue was about the need for a jobs diversification strategy. The SNP has not engaged with that issue.

I did not get an answer from Nicola Sturgeon, so I pose the question again: what have the feeble six been up to? When did they last focus properly on the issue? As Roseanna Cunningham suggested on a previous occasion, there has been no debate on the issue at Westminster. One would have to search quite far back to find the answer. Instead of debating the issue at Westminster, the SNP prefers to posture in the chamber of the Scottish Parliament, where it has no direct influence on the decision. Indeed, some less kind commentators have suggested that the debate is entirely diversionary, given that it comes in the week that an £11 billion black hole has been exposed in the SNP budget and leading experts shredded its plans for council tax reform. I would not be so unkind.

Nicola Sturgeon talked about the honourable thing to do in the debate. Everyone wants to see the decommissioning of nuclear weapons—I do, and I hope that she does, too. A world that is free of nuclear weapons is a genuine and shared aspiration, although we may disagree on whether disarmament should be done on a multilateral or unilateral basis. However, in an increasingly uncertain world, we have a responsibility to consider what is best for the nation's security.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): Will the member give way?

Jackie Baillie: No.

I challenge the SNP on whether it is being honourable in the debate. Since the last debate took place, what action has the SNP taken to consider the alternatives, including those for the people who are employed in the defence industry? I am referring to the 11,000 people whose jobs are dependent on Faslane and Coulport, 7,000 of whom are employed directly by the Faslane base, never mind the impact on the wider defence industry throughout Scotland.

Has the SNP moved on from its previous position? Let me remind its members what that was. Alex Salmond said that the Scottish navy would be at Rosyth. Great. However, someone in the west said that the Scottish navy would be at Faslane. My goodness, but the Scottish navy will be massive. We are not that stupid; the SNP's position is inherently dishonest.

There is also the sheer hypocrisy of SNP members who argue for Trident submarines to be refitted at Rosyth. The SNP has no answers and takes no responsibility for the consequences of its actions. God forbid it, but if the SNP ever ended up in charge, 11,000 P45s would be issued to hard-working people in my area and to thousands more throughout Scotland. If the SNP was serious, it would rise to the challenge of considering alternatives, but it is not.

10:06

Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): It has been a short but interesting debate in which many points have been covered. I want to address those that were made in two or three speeches.

First, Maureen Macmillan said that she is against nuclear weapons. However, her amendment bears no relation to what her party leader in the Scottish Parliament wants to do or to what her party leader in London wants to do. Christine May had a go at the Liberal Democrats, following an excellent speech from my colleague Jim Wallace. The Liberal Democrats take a highly measured approach: we do not support a

headlong rush into an unnecessary decision to spend up to £25 billion—a vast amount of money—on a replacement system, when Christine May's Labour colleagues on the House of Commons Defence Committee say that no decision needs to be taken for up to another seven years. Why is the Prime Minister in such a rush? We all know the answer to that question.

I am not surprised about the Tories' position, which Phil Gallie outlined in his speech. He said that he believed the Prime Minister over the Iraq war, but on several occasions he has told Parliament that he was wrong to do so. Now he says that the Prime Minister is right in what he says in the white paper, but could not Tony Blair be wrong again? On nuclear weapons, the Tory party is renowned for its deference and now its irrelevance.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton (Lothians) (Con): Is the member aware that at one time Tony Blair, Gordon Brown and John Reid were unilateral disarmers? That means that at one stage of their lives they must have been on the right side.

Mike Rumbles: That is an interesting observation. Lord James Douglas-Hamilton is absolutely right—they probably were on the right side at one stage of their lives.

I want to focus on our amendment, which we lodged because Liberal Democrats north and south of the border have a long-standing commitment to multilateral elimination of nuclear weapons, but also to retaining the UK's current nuclear deterrent until such progress has been made. Although the decision on the replacement of the Trident system is, as we all know, reserved to Westminster, the Liberal Democrats believe that it is vital that Scotland's voice, through the Scottish Parliament, be heard in the debate.

Successive UK Governments—Tory then Labour—have made little progress on nuclear disarmament. Indeed, the failure earlier this year to make any meaningful progress on disarmament of both the nuclear non-proliferation treaty review conference and the United Nations summit has been hugely disappointing.

I hope that at decision time at 5 o'clock all of us in the Scottish Parliament can speak with one voice and send a clear message to our colleagues in the House of Commons that we reject the UK Government's case, and that we urge MPs to vote against the proposals in the Government's white paper when they make their decision next March. I encourage MSPs from all parties to unite behind the Liberal Democrats' amendment and to send a clear message to the UK Government from the people of Scotland.

10:10

Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con): Debates on this subject always generate great passion, as a number of speeches have demonstrated. I cannot agree with Jackie Baillie that we should deprecate people who hold a sincere political view, although I am singularly unpersuaded by the arguments of the Scottish National Party.

In her opening speech, Nicola Sturgeon talked about the moral dimension to the argument. I think that we all agree on aspects of what she said. She must realise that SNP members do not have a monopoly of concern about the possible consequences of the launch of a Trident missile. However, to suggest that the country is not safer because we have had nuclear weapons during the past 60 years or so is to deny the lessons of history.

Nicola Sturgeon: Does Bill Aitken think that the 180 countries throughout the world that do not have nuclear weapons are less safe because of that?

Bill Aitken: The 180 countries that do not have nuclear weapons have not been in a position to acquire them—that is the bottom line.

Nicola Sturgeon: Should they acquire them? Will the member give way on that point?

Bill Aitken: I must move on.

The fact is that members are part of a cosseted generation in that none of us has had to go to war. My father had to go to war, as did his father, but that has not happened to us because of the deterrent effect of nuclear weapons. To suggest that there is a lack of candidates who might cause trouble in the world is to demonstrate a degree of naivety that I find astonishing. We need look no closer than the middle east, where one country has built up significant conventional and nuclear forces and is led by a president whom we might kindly describe as a megalomaniac—[*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh): Order.

Bill Aitken: It is irresponsible to suggest that we should not retain our nuclear deterrent in such a climate.

The amendment in Jim Wallace's name represents a typical Liberal exercise in stalling and deferring decisions. The Liberals will have to come off the fence eventually: I remind Mike Rumbles that he who constantly sits on the fence ends up speaking in a high-pitched voice.

Mr Wallace: Will the member give way?

Bill Aitken: I am sorry, but I do not have time.

The Liberal party will eventually have to decide where it stands.

Jim Wallace is right that the threat that we faced changed completely in the 1980s. Of course it did: the cold war ended as a result of the firm line that was taken by President Reagan and Mrs Thatcher. However, who can say that the threat will not change again? History shows that events are always fluid and we must acknowledge that.

I think that all members genuinely wish that nuclear weapons had not been invented, but the nuclear genie is firmly out of the bottle and we must deal with the situation as it is and not as we wish it was. To suggest that this country should not have a nuclear deterrent is not just to fail to learn the lessons of history but to demonstrate a naivety and irresponsibility that Parliament should reject.

10:14

John Home Robertson (East Lothian) (Lab): The SNP motion notes that the Government has initiated a debate about the nuclear element of Britain's defence capability. The white paper on the future of the UK's nuclear deterrent has been published. The public debate continues and a decision will be taken by the House of Commons next year.

Some of us are genuinely sceptical about the credibility and value of nuclear deterrence. Others—including the Liberal Democrats, I think—believe that it is essential for the protection of our national and collective security. However, we should all be able to welcome the proposal in the white paper for a further 20 per cent cut in the number of nuclear warheads, which will add up to a 50 per cent reduction in warheads since 1997. That is a significant achievement by the Labour Government, but the bad news is that North Korea, Israel and India now have nuclear weapons. Such proliferation may be a justification for keeping Britain's capacity to deter.

The debate is serious, and we are all entitled to have our say as British citizens. If we were not British citizens, we would have no say, but we would still face a risk if Britain were to be attacked with nuclear weapons.

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): Will the member give way?

John Home Robertson: I am sorry, but I have only four minutes.

As we approach the election next May, let us have a debate about the military, economic and political consequences of the nationalists' defence policies. The SNP is always keen to jump on bandwagons to support infantry regiments and Royal Air Force squadrons in Scotland, although it tends to criticise the deployment of those forces as "unpardonable folly". However, I have not heard

the nationalists complaining about Royal Navy warships being built on the Clyde and, like Jackie Baillie and Phil Gallie, I remember them campaigning for Trident nuclear ballistic missile submarines to be refitted at Rosyth.

The fundamental nationalist objective— independence—would mean a Scottish ministry of defence, although I do not know where; the withdrawal of Scottish personnel from the British armed forces; and the establishment of a Scottish army, navy and air force. The SNP has suggested that its independent Scotland would have armed forces similar to those of the Scandinavian countries that are outside NATO. It would be expensive to maintain so many trained professional service personnel, so the SNP might have to resort to conscription. National service for neds could be one way of hiding the unemployment that would arise from the break-up of the United Kingdom, but it would not be the same as a professional army.

There is also the small matter of equipment for Scottish forces. An independent Scotland would end up with lightly armed territorial defence forces that were outside NATO and incapable of taking part in major peacekeeping operations. So much for the nationalists' stated commitment to the historic battalions of the Royal Regiment of Scotland. There would be no prospect of state-of-the-art Typhoon jets for Lossiemouth or Leuchars and I do not think that the SNP would buy new Clyde-built type 45 destroyers for the Scottish fisheries protection fleet. Those important issues must be understood as we approach the election in May. Independence for Scotland would be the end of a proud military tradition and would destroy thousands of defence-related jobs, not only in Dunbartonshire.

Our Labour Government is making real progress with multilateral nuclear disarmament. I welcome that and I trust the House of Commons to make the right decision on the issue next year. The economic case for the United Kingdom is well known, but I welcome the opportunity to begin a debate about Scotland's interests in British security and Britain's armed forces. The choice next May will be between a weak and inward-looking nationalist Scotland and a strong and confident British Scotland with all the advantages of the union dividend. The time has come to settle that argument once and for all. Think of Alex Salmond as the commander in chief of a Scottish army—I rest my case. I urge the Parliament to support Maureen Macmillan's amendment.

10:18

Bruce Crawford (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): I say to John Home Robertson that £25 billion buys a lot of conventional weapons. I

wonder whether his loyalist speech was his application to get into the House of Lords—he will no longer be able to buy a place there, because the SNP MPs have put a stop to that nonsense.

Nicola Sturgeon raised the moral case against the renewal of Trident, which she rightly described as being against the nuclear non-proliferation treaty. I want to expose the flaws in the incredibly dodgy dossier—the white paper—which is another dodgy dossier from a dodgy Government. Maureen Macmillan's amendment states:

"the UK Government has initiated a debate on the future of the independent nuclear deterrent force and urges everyone in Scotland to take part in it".

However, according to Labour members, that means everyone except members of the Scottish Parliament. How contradictory can people be?

This must also be the shortest debate in history.

John Home Robertson: The SNP timetabled it.

Bruce Crawford: I am talking about the debate on the white paper, not the one that we are having today.

On 7 December, the Prime Minister, Tony Blair, wrote to George Bush and said:

"We have decided that we will replace the Vanguard submarines with another class of submarines in the 2020s, and would like these submarines to continue to carry Trident II D5 missiles.

Accordingly, we wish to participate in the planned life extension programme for the Trident II D5 missile, which we understand is intended to extend the life of the missiles into the 2040s."

"Please, George, can we be in your gang?" That is what that letter was all about. On the same day, George Bush replied:

"the United States fully supports and welcomes the intention of the United Kingdom to participate in the life-extension program"

of Trident.

The decision has already been made by Blair and Brown and Jack McConnell, and the rest of the Labour Party is following along nicely.

Phil Gallie accused the SNP of trying to stand up for Scottish jobs in Rosyth. I say that the SNP is right to argue that, if we are taking the risk, our people should be getting those jobs. As a consequence of Malcolm Rifkind's decision, we now have seven rusting hulks in Rosyth. That is our inheritance from a Tory Government. Further, the Labour Party can give us no lectures on jobs, given the thousands of jobs that have been lost in Rosyth since it came to power.

Jackie Baillie: Will the member give way?

Bruce Crawford: Jackie Baillie asked for honesty, but she should be more honest. She said

that 11,000 jobs would be lost if we did not have Trident. However, in a written answer, Geoff Hoon, the then Secretary of State for Defence, said:

"The number of civilian jobs which directly rely upon the Trident programme is estimated to be 936 in Scotland, with an additional 6,640 in the rest of the United Kingdom. The number of civilian jobs which indirectly rely upon the Trident programme is estimated to be 300 in Scotland and 5,700 for the rest of the UK."—[*Official Report, House of Commons*, 21 February 2005; Vol 431, c 128W.]

Jackie Baillie says that her position is multilateralist. If that is the case, she also wants to negotiate away those weapons, which means that she also has to answer the question of what she would do with Trident on the Clyde.

Jackie Baillie: I would be delighted to.

Bruce Crawford: Sit down. The member has had her chance to speak.

Christine May said that we are having this debate because we want to avoid other issues. However, she then airbrushed out any Trident content from her speech. The purpose of this debate is to ensure that the members of the Labour Party are held to account and are forced to debate these issues in the Scottish Parliament.

Sarah Boyack: Will the member take an intervention on that point?

Bruce Crawford: I want to make some progress on the issue of Trident being a deterrent.

Michael McMahon (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab): This is not a debate, it is a lecture.

Bruce Crawford: Michael McMahon is right to say that a debate is not happening in the country. However, he is one of the people who signed up to the position that he does not approve of—our having the Trident weapons system in the future. We will see how he votes at 5 o'clock.

In the past, an intellectual argument was made for having Trident as a deterrent. People who held that view said that the Russian bear was a problem and that the Soviet bloc posed a threat. I never accepted that argument, but at least it had some intellectual rigour. Today, however, we should be asking ourselves who the Trident weapons are aimed at. The answer is no one. Who will they be aimed at in the future? No one really knows. Occasionally, when Blair, Brown or other Labour members get into a hole, they start trotting out the names of Korea or Iran or even suggest that the Russian bear might return. That is no way in which to properly formulate foreign and defence policy. Certainly, it is not a sound basis for spending £25 billion on a new weapons of mass destruction system—a deterrent with no clear enemy targets.

The white paper is a policy of hopelessness and despair. The truth is that Blair, Brown, the First

Minister and probably many of the Labour back benchers have now abandoned multilateralism in favour of retaining nuclear weapons for all time.

Jackie Baillie: What?

Bruce Crawford: The white paper kills multilateralism stone dead. I suggest that Labour members go and read it and find out the truth of the matter. Paragraph 3.8, on page 19, says:

"Currently no state has both the intent to threaten our vital interests and the capability to do so with nuclear weapons"

and paragraph 3.10 says:

"Over the next 20 to 50 years, one or more states could also emerge that possess a more limited nuclear capability".

[*Interruption.*]

Mr Swinney: Read the white paper. It is all in there.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order. Mr Crawford is speaking; nobody else should be.

Bruce Crawford: If Labour's policy is built on not knowing what threats there will be in the future, it can only be a policy to retain weapons of mass destruction for all time. Yes, it is time for honesty, but let us be honest that multilateralism is dead in the Labour Party. There is no question about that.

As MSPs, we will have a clear choice tonight. We can decide to support the position of Blair, Brown and McConnell, whose vanity will throw away any moral authority that the UK still has and waste £25 billion, or we can be on the side of the Scottish people and say loudly and clearly that there is no moral, military or economic argument for a new era of weapons of mass destruction on the Clyde. The SNP stands four-square with their removal and with the people of Scotland. Where do Labour members stand?

Post Offices

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh):

The next item of business is a debate on motion S2M-5349, in the name of John Swinney, on post offices.

10:26

Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP): This debate is an opportunity for the Parliament to express its concern about the future of the post office network in Scotland and the sweeping changes that the United Kingdom Government proposes.

A couple of weeks ago, I hosted a members' business debate on the issue, which attracted a tremendous amount of interest from across the political spectrum. Subsequent to that debate, the UK Government announced that it plans to close 2,500 post offices throughout the UK, which will have a significant impact on Scotland. The issue is of such significance that it must be addressed by the Scottish Parliament. The matter is reserved, but the decision will have major consequences for a range of communities in Scotland.

Post offices play a vital role in our communities. They are often the hub of local activity and a gathering point for local people. They are an essential link in maintaining the viability of the last shop in the village or, in many cases, they are the only shop that provides a local service in isolated urban communities within our larger cities. Whether they are in urban or rural settings, post offices are vital to the health and well-being of countless communities in our country.

Scotland has 1,116 rural post offices, 343 urban post offices and 211 post offices in urban deprived areas. In total, there are 1,670 post offices throughout Scotland. Evidence on the effect of the changes that have been made to the post office network so far shows that, when a post office closes, more than 80 per cent of the shops associated with it also close. It is reasonable to assume that, if there is a substantial decline in the number of post offices in Scotland, there will be a subsequent reduction in the availability of local retail facilities in rural and urban communities. The exposure of deprived urban communities to that problem is enormously significant. The loss of footfall when a post office closes means that other shops and services close as well.

The UK Government's decision to engineer the closure of 2,500 post office branches poses a massive threat to the viability of a comprehensive post office network in Scotland. It takes no account of the issues of geography that affect the delivery of the network in Scotland's most sparsely populated communities, particularly those in the

rural north and south. In arguing for that change in the House of Commons, the UK Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, Alistair Darling, said:

"Traditionally, the post office was the place where people went to post a letter, to pay their utility bills and to collect their benefits. Many still do, but increasingly people choose to send an e-mail or text, they pay bills by direct debit or internet banking, and they pay for their tax disc online and have pensions or benefits paid into their bank accounts."—*[Official Report, House of Commons, 14 December 2006; Vol 454, c 1026.]*

The secretary of state says those things as if they have happened by osmosis and have absolutely nothing to do with the intervention or encouragement of the Government. The present Government has been making it ever more difficult for people to use exactly those post office services that the secretary of state commented upon. The option to have pensions paid at the post office has been in the small print of forms that are structured to encourage people to have pensions paid by direct debit. The Government introduced the Post Office card account, but then allowed it to drift away with uncertainty. One Government department has given the Post Office financial support, whereas other departments have encouraged individuals to take business away from the post office.

Ministers have lectured us about the importance of using sustainable transport and public transport. However, as a consequence of decisions that the Government has taken about the post office network, post bus services, which provide part of the essential rural transport network, are being removed. That is another laughable advert for supposed joined-up government of the United Kingdom.

We accept that the post office network cannot remain the same forever. Patterns of life change. We argue that the Government could and should be doing much more to maximise the possibility of the network remaining viable. The Government could be encouraging more transactions to be carried out in post offices. The Government could be encouraging the linking up of post offices to other public services to create viable units in communities, which would have the benefit of expanding multiple functions and improving access to public services. The Government could be examining ways of working in partnership with local providers to continue service provision in a different fashion, but with the key requirement of ensuring that the services continue. As part of its public service reform agenda, the Government could be encouraging local authorities to ensure that local people are able to use post offices for many more transactional services.

But no: the Government instead chooses the blunt approach. It simply decides how many post offices will close and then forces the network to

change accordingly. That approach is consistent with the Government's inability to improve the delivery of services at the local level, and it should be resisted by us all. The Scottish Parliament has the chance to do that today, and to ensure that we speak up on an issue that will have significant consequences in the communities of rural and urban Scotland. I invite members to put pressure on the UK Government today to protect those vital local services for the communities of Scotland.

I move,

That the Parliament expresses its concern at the reductions in the post office network proposed by the UK Government and calls on the Scottish Executive to make representations to the UK Government to ensure that Scotland retains a comprehensive and accessible post office network.

10:33

Dr Sylvia Jackson (Stirling) (Lab): I am pleased to speak in this debate. My constituency is both urban and rural, and constituents, particularly those belonging to the National Federation of SubPostmasters, have always lobbied hard to maintain the post office network. I gather that recent news coverage on the issue included constituents from west Stirlingshire.

Although I share similar sentiments to those expressed in the Scottish National Party motion, and while I accept that it is necessary to examine carefully the UK Government's proposals for the future of the post office network, including the consultation paper, to ensure that the special needs of Scotland's remoter communities are properly taken into account, my amendment seeks to go further than the SNP motion by building on the statement that the First Minister made last week at First Minister's question time. My amendment therefore

"welcomes the Scottish Executive's proposal to apply four criteria"

in assessing the statement from the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry.

Those criteria are, first, whether there will be an acceptable level of future services, especially in remote rural and disadvantaged communities; secondly, whether there will be recognition that post offices do not play a purely commercial role in our communities, but have an important social role as well; thirdly, whether there will be proper consultation with affected local communities; and fourthly, whether there will be a continuation of Post Office efforts to promote innovative means of service delivery. Those important points have been taken on board.

I emphasise the social role of post offices in our communities, particularly in areas where the post office, with its associated shops, is the only facility

that offers certain services. Elderly people and those who are without ready access to transport are the most dependent on those limited yet vital services.

Vulnerable communities must be protected—I agree with John Swinney on that point. I regard such protection as the key aspect of the criteria listed by the First Minister. For that reason, I have added to my amendment the words:

"it is important that the vital social and economic role of post offices has been acknowledged".

Changes that have already been made to the post office network have presented problems. From speaking to more elderly constituents, I know that there have been difficulties in using keypads and personal identification numbers. Such changes are seen as challenges by most of us, but we often fail to realise that certain people, particularly the elderly, are unable to manage those changes and therefore find an alternative route for dealing with their finances, and when that happens the loser is the post office.

Although I wanted to make that point, we accept that changes continue to occur at all levels—which is the point that John Swinney slightly misses—and that some of the changes have been for good reasons, such as combating fraud. There are no easy answers. We cannot suddenly stop the increased use of computers in our homes or the use of telephone banking, for example. Those changes help busy people such as us to deal with their finances quickly and efficiently.

There is no doubting that the post office service will need to keep adapting if it is to survive, as we want it to. Recent statistics show that every week last year the Post Office made a loss of £2 million. That loss has increased to £4 million a week this year.

There are good examples of innovative practices where communities have worked together, usually with other agencies, to develop a community post office and shop facility. Gartmore in my constituency is one such example, and another is developing in Fintry. My point is that communities have a responsibility too—to be involved and to stay involved, and not simply to go down to the supermarket in the nearest town or city. However, partnership working and establishing innovative practices will need money, which is why I added to my amendment the words:

"pleased to see the commitment of £1.7 billion to support the network and to pay for restructuring".

The statement by Alistair Darling suggested opening at least 500 new outreach locations and other innovations on that theme. I support such initiatives. That approach is to be welcomed, as is the desire to provide more new services for post office customers. As many members will know, the

post office is the market leader in foreign exchange provision.

The helpful briefing that we received from Help the Aged says that

"it is of paramount importance that a 'one size fits all' approach is not adopted"

here in Scotland. That comment fits well with the First Minister's criterion for local consultation. I ask everybody to support my amendment.

I move amendment S2M-5349.4, to leave out from "expresses" to end and insert:

"believes that it is necessary to look carefully at the UK Government's proposals for the future of the post office network in full and the consultation paper itself to ensure that the special needs of Scotland's remoter communities are properly taken into account; welcomes the Scottish Executive's proposal to apply four criteria to this assessment, namely whether there will be an acceptable level of future services, especially in remote rural and disadvantaged communities, whether there is a recognition that post offices do not occupy a purely commercial role in our communities, but have an important social role to play, whether there is proper consultation with affected local communities and whether there will be a continuation of Post Office efforts to promote innovative means of service delivery; believes that it is important that the vital social and economic role of post offices has been acknowledged; is pleased to see the commitment of £1.7 billion to support the network and to pay for restructuring and that the annual social network payment will remain in place meantime, and is encouraged by the push for outreach locations for remote communities".

10:39

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I welcome the debate. As we have heard, the future of the rural sub-post office network is a vital issue for much of Scotland. I appreciate that support for sub-post offices is reserved, but it impacts on the economy of rural Scotland. Accordingly, the Scottish Executive must take an interest. Even the Labour amendment acknowledges that point.

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): Given what the member has just said, and given the impact of the issue on vulnerable communities, does the member not find it quite disgraceful that not a single minister is here to speak? Is the member aware that, in a debate on this issue several years ago, ministers responded?

Murdo Fraser: Christine Grahame makes a fair point. The motion and the Labour amendment refer to the Scottish Executive but no one is here to represent the Executive's view on the matter. Ministers require to reflect upon that.

For people living in rural Scotland, local sub-post offices are part of the fabric of local life. Over a long period, many local communities have seen services being run down. We have seen the closure of local shops, primary schools and churches in many communities. In many of those

places, the local sub-post office remains the sole hub of community life. This is not just an economic issue but an important social one. Rural sub-post offices are particularly well used by the elderly, many of whom lack their own transport. The closure of those sub-post offices would increase the social exclusion and isolation of many in that group. I listened with interest to the warm words of Sylvia Jackson, on behalf of Labour, about the post office network. The fact is, however, that under the Labour Government at Westminster we have already lost a quarter of the United Kingdom's post office network. The impact of such closures has been felt throughout Scotland.

Last week, Alistair Darling, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, outlined the Government's approach to post offices, which included a prediction that 2,500 more post offices throughout the UK would close from the summer of next year. That is a depressing picture. It will have a serious impact throughout rural Scotland.

Dr Jackson: Will the member give way?

Murdo Fraser: I would like to make some progress, if I may.

The Labour Government uses as its excuse for those closures the fact that post office revenue has declined. The irony, to which I refer in my amendment, is that that decline in revenue comes largely as a result of conscious decisions by the Government to take business away from the post office network and make it uncompetitive. As Sylvia Jackson said, society has changed and people are behaving in different ways, but that should not be an excuse for the Government taking deliberate actions that have exacerbated the situation. For example, switching benefit payments from post offices to bank accounts effectively withdrew a major source of revenue from local post offices. They lost not just the transaction costs but the footfall—those who collected benefits often spent cash in the post office or the attached local shop.

Mr Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab): Will the member take an intervention?

Murdo Fraser: I am afraid that I am in my last minute, Mr McNeil.

The Government introduced the Post Office card account then pledged to discontinue it but, in the teeth of widespread opposition, supported by my Conservative colleagues at Westminster, I am pleased to say that it has performed a U-turn on that proposal. There are other examples, such as the television licence situation, which has been referred to, and the situation with road tax.

We need a new approach. My Conservative colleagues at Westminster have already pledged that they would rewrite sub-postmasters' contracts

to allow them to provide a greater range of products and services, including private mail services. The long-term future of the network will be best secured if post offices open up to new markets and new customers. The Scottish Executive could be doing much more with new schemes to support the post office network directly.

Last week, Alistair Darling announced a consultation exercise, which is due to end in March—a cynical exercise to try to park the issue until after the Scottish Parliament elections. If that is his intention, he will be sadly disappointed. Post offices will be a major issue in the Scottish Parliament elections.

I move amendment S2M-5349.1, to insert, after first “Government”:

“notes that decisions taken by the UK Government have themselves contributed to the losses being made by the post office network and that it is therefore disingenuous for ministers to justify the extensive scaling down of the network on the basis that it is losing money; believes that the UK Government should seek to bring new business opportunities to the network rather than merely manage its decline”.

10:43

Euan Robson (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD): The future of our post offices is an important, although reserved issue. Research by the Liberal Democrat party indicates that between 1999 and this year, just over 300 post offices in Scotland closed. In my constituency, there were 42 post offices when I was first elected. By 2005, 36 remained, but I can think of three that have closed this year alone. Nowhere in the country—urban or rural—is immune from that trend, which will simply get worse, because in March 2006 the UK Government’s policy of avoiding unnecessary branch closures was ended. That policy had slowed down the rate of closures, particularly in rural areas.

The proposal—or suggestion or whatever it is—for a further 2,500 post office closures throughout the UK is likely to lead to dozens more local communities losing their post offices, unless the UK Government takes resolute action to prevent that. The Liberal Democrats are calling on the Government to stop the unnecessary closure programme and instead to free the Royal Mail from restrictive regulation, to invest in the future of the post office network and to stop removing Government business from it, in order to safeguard our post offices.

Murdo Fraser: Is it still Liberal Democrat policy to privatise the Post Office?

Euan Robson: It is not and never has been Liberal Democrat policy to privatise the Post

Office, and Mr Fraser is clearly mistaken in his view that it was.

The UK Government has directly or indirectly overseen the Post Office’s loss of TV licences, vehicle excise duty and passport authentication work. We heard from previous speakers about the transfer of benefit and pension payments to direct payment into bank accounts, which resulted in the loss of about £400 million of income. That is a classic case of Government looking at the narrow cost saving without any proper consideration for the wider consequences.

The UK Government has announced that it will not extend its contract for pension and benefit payments using the Post Office card account beyond 2010. The current contract is worth £1 billion in income for post offices between 2003 and 2010. It is said that a replacement will be put in place, but the competitive tender process means that the Post Office could lose that work altogether.

As we all know, and as Mr Swinney eloquently suggested, post offices are focal points for, and play an important social role in, our communities. They can be key components of local shops and hubs of local activity and information services. If the post office goes, the village shop is put under threat, as has been the case in a number of communities since 1999. Sub-post offices cannot live on good will or fresh air. They need to be allowed to compete and to win business. There should be less regulation, and sub-post masters should be properly rewarded for carrying out tasks for local and national government at local level.

In Germany, Deutsche Post has introduced access to the eBay auction system for people without computers. That is run via its post office network. Devon County Council is considering a system for ordering, collecting and returning library books via post offices. Other innovations occur, such as the one in my constituency in which the police use a post office in Chirnside in Berwickshire as a contact point. Post offices can become one-stop shops for Government and local government services and for quangos and agencies, many of which could do with raising the profile of what they are supposed to do for the general public.

The Royal Mail is increasingly exposed to competition but needs £2 billion of investment and has an estimated deficit or shortfall of £4 billion in its pension fund. The Royal Mail parallel to the Post Office crisis is that universal postal prices and door-to-door deliveries will end unless action is taken. We need a statutory guarantee requiring maintenance of the universal service obligation. Unlike other parties, the Liberal Democrats have a comprehensive plan to support the Royal Mail and ensure its continuation.

I move amendment S2M-5349.3, to leave out from “expresses” to end and insert:

“believes that the post office network plays a crucial role in Scotland; notes that this is a reserved issue and supports the Liberal Democrats’ rejection of the recommendation of the UK Government’s post office network consultation paper that a further 2,500 post office branches be closed across the United Kingdom.”

10:48

Carolyn Leckie (Central Scotland) (SSP): It is important to place the debate in context, including a political context. The Central Scotland region lost a total of 19 post offices in the most recent wave of closures. Nine of those were in socially deprived areas of North Lanarkshire such as Sikeside, Viewpark, Clarkston and Holytown. That did not happen by accident or in isolation. It is part of the Government’s ideologically driven right-wing offensive on public services.

I am sure that, as is always the case, the Tories will confirm that point. They are prepared to be honest about that kind of agenda but, since the Labour Government came into power, it has used the politics of stealth. At least Thatcher was honest about what she was doing. Public services, including the Post Office, have been subjected to the unbundling, as it is called—as business calls it, in fact, because it recognises the process that is going on and is prepared to be honest about it—of parts of the business. That unbundling has taken place not only in post offices, but in the Royal Mail, in the job cuts that are proposed for the civil service, in local government and in the national health service. Either Labour members have been hoodwinked about that or they are complicit in and collude with the Government’s smoke and mirrors tactics.

The closures are part of a strategic, co-ordinated and systematic ideological offensive on public services and on the concept of community planning and social need in favour of the eventual complete marketisation and privatisation of all Government and public services. That is a global agenda, which the Parliament should be capable of debating and confronting.

The offensive needs to be confronted with a coherent alternative ideology—that is why I am a socialist and I am clear about that. However, that is where the main opposition parties run into bother, especially the Scottish National Party. It does not put forward any coherent ideological opposition.

As the Tories have confirmed, the Government’s excuse for closing post offices—that they are not viable—is a direct result of their policies of unbundling and privatising Government services. Post offices should exist according to social need, as the Communication Workers Union makes plain

in its briefing, which I recommend. It contains several recommendations that would make post offices viable, even in the current climate. As the CWU says:

“No counters network in the world has achieved stable and sustained profitability.”

Using the Government’s measure is a con trick, and unless members understand the ideological context that the measures are part of, they have been successfully conned. Either that, or they accept that context, which would at least be honest.

As we have heard, if services are not planned according to community and social need, it is the most vulnerable who suffer. I remember Labour in opposition goading the Tories for having a go at the same vulnerable groups who will be most affected by post office closures.

Appealing to this neo-liberal, ideologically driven Government to help protect public services is like appealing to Dracula to stop drinking blood. Unless there is a complete reversal of Government policy on the post office network—by returning Government business to post offices, by expanding the Post Office card account to deliver free and accessible banking to excluded communities, and by paying the proper rates for the services that post offices provide—closures are inevitable. They are inevitable because the Government has planned it that way, and we need to confront that and deal with it.

I move amendment S2M-5349.2, to insert, after second “Government”:

“to begin paying post offices adequately for the government services they provide, to return services that it has withdrawn, such as issuing television licenses, to post offices, to begin the development of post office accounts as a banking facility for those living in deprived and rural communities and to consider providing assistance to communities in deprived urban and rural areas to open community post offices to prevent the loss of vital local services, and thus”.

10:52

Richard Lochhead (Moray) (SNP): I am delighted that the SNP has chosen to debate this vital issue, but I am extremely disappointed that ministers have chosen to be absent. That shows contempt for our rural communities and undermines the Parliament as an institution. The empty row of ministerial chairs sends out a loud and clear message to rural communities.

Last week’s statement in the House of Commons on the future of the rural sub-post office network struck fear into the hearts of rural communities. We are in the run-up to Christmas, which is the busiest time for the post office network in rural communities, and many

communities and post office staff will be wondering whether their branches will be open in 18 months' or two years' time. Scotland is bound to take the biggest hit from any closure programme. The figures quoted so far are that Scotland could lose anything from 300 to 600 sub-post offices. Anything remotely on that scale would be devastating for our rural communities.

Moray Council is currently discussing the future of nine rural schools in my constituency. Those communities will have sub-post offices as well, so they will find themselves in a position in which not only their schools but their sub-post offices are under threat. Those same communities have lost their petrol stations, shops and local bank branches in recent years.

It is about time that UK ministers in London asked themselves what their vision is for the future of rural communities in Scotland, because we are in real danger of turning rural communities into a preserve of the wealthy. People will have to have a car to travel to post offices elsewhere if their local post office closes, and there will be no schools, so people will have to use their cars for that too. Vulnerable local people, those without work and the elderly will be left in the lurch if rural facilities continue to close. It is hypocritical for the UK Government to say that the fact that the post office network is making a loss is the reason why its future has to be reviewed when, as others have said, the same Government has withdrawn the very services that provided that network with vital income.

The crux of the debate is that the rural post office network does not play simply a commercial role. It also has a social role. The Scottish Government's research from July this year, which was published after examining three case studies in rural Scotland, listed the many reasons why local communities value their rural post offices. Those reasons include the fact that rural post offices provide

"access to post office services to community members who are restricted from using other services due to their geographical location, regardless of income or physical well being"

and

"promote financial inclusion ... Accessing these post office services locally is reported to be useful by more vulnerable groups of the communities, such as groups of older people, who draw their pension from the post office, groups of disabled people"

and others who do not have access to local bus services. According to the research, a post office provides a hub in the community and plays a role in the local tourism industry, by providing information for tourists.

In the Scottish Government's Environment and Rural Affairs Department's business plan, the list of priorities for rural communities in 2006 says that ministers will contribute to UK policy on the post office network. It is vital that the Parliament finds out what was said. The time for submissions to the UK Government was in June, July and August—before Alistair Darling made his statement in the House of Commons. We must have transparency. Our rural communities deserve to know what input ministers in this Parliament made to UK ministers before the statement was made and that input should be published. I hope that Parliament will use the opportunity today to stand up for our rural communities.

10:56

Mr Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab): Presiding Officer, if you will indulge me, I will welcome to the Parliament the pupils from Earnhill primary school in my constituency. I am sure that everyone wishes them a merry Christmas.

We all understand that many members have genuine concerns about post offices in their constituencies. I therefore take comfort from the Labour Government's commitment to maintaining a network of post offices throughout the UK. I welcome the fact that the Government will lay down rules to govern the location of post offices in the network and the fact that those network access rules will take care to ensure that remote and rural areas and deprived urban areas are served properly.

Apart from anything else, the Government proposals will allow Post Office Ltd to manage the network actively. Contrary to what John Swinney says, that will put the right people in the right locations rather than being a case-by-case response to choices that individual sub-postmasters make.

However, those are just boring facts that the SNP chooses to ignore because they do not fit its pantomime view of the world—told to us yet again by Buttons, played by John Swinney—in which the wicked stepmother Westminster beats and deprives poor wee Cinderella Scotland. Like the younger audience members at the Pavilion and the King's this month, SNP members do not care if the story is a bit far-fetched. As long as the songs are easy, there is lots of shouting and they get an ice cream at half-time, they go home happy.

Mr Swinney: Look behind you!

Mr McNeil: How would the story go if the fairy godmother across the Thames—possibly played by Ian Rankie, with Jimmy Rankie as Nicola—waved her magic wand and made Scotland independent? For a start, as has been said,

Scotland has a disproportionately high share of the UK's post offices. Scotland has 11.7 per cent of the UK network, but 8.6 per cent of the population. We have 14 per cent of the rural network and 9 per cent of urban post offices, but because we are part of a UK-wide system, the cost of funding those post offices is spread throughout the UK. That would not be the case under independence.

The SNP needs to tell us by how much the cost of a stamp would rise to pay for Scottish post offices that the union currently subsidises. How many postal workers would the SNP need to sack? Which post offices would it end up closing anyway? Why should we pay international postage rates to send, say, Christmas cards to friends and family abroad in England?

What about the cost to business? Sending post from Northern Ireland to the Republic of Ireland costs 20 per cent more. Such a price hike would be passed on to Scottish businesses, and if those companies' main consumer bases were in England, Wales or Northern Ireland, why would they simply not relocate? How long would it take this pony express to deliver a letter from Stornoway to Sussex? How would the economies of scale that we would lose be paid for us? I could go on, but I am used to the wheels falling off SNP bandwagons. This one has turned back into a pumpkin, and it is not even midnight.

11:00

Mr Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): I am grateful to the SNP for giving us another opportunity to discuss in the chamber the future of the post office network.

The motion that we are debating refers to

"a comprehensive and accessible post office network",

but the issue goes far beyond that. We are debating the future of our communities and of our local economies to boot. It will be a false economy to strip away the £150 million subsidy from the rural network, because we will be left with a degenerated rural economy that will need rebuilding yet again in other, more expensive ways that will be unavailable in future as European Union funds disappear.

It is not just about rural post offices. Over the past couple of years there have been no less than eight urban post office closures for each rural post office that has been forced out of business. A recently published report by the New Economics Foundation demonstrated the benefits that urban post offices offer to their local economies. The report showed that each urban post office saves small businesses more than a quarter of a million pounds each year. Around 60 per cent of local

businesses reported significant negative impacts on their business, their clients or their area in general following the closure of an urban post office. The lead author of the report issues us a stark warning of which we should take heed. He says:

"post office closures deal a double blow as they are not only an anchor for the local community, but also for local enterprise. The closure can trigger a tipping point leading to a downward cycle that leaves ghost communities with very few shops and services left".

The question at the heart of the debate is how much we value our local economies, full stop. In an era of globalisation, it may be tempting to think that we do not need them, that we can get everything online and that too much reliance on local services is a hangover from an earlier, less efficient age. However, I argue—as many members have argued in the chamber this morning—that if we are to build a sustainable Scotland, we need sustainable communities that incorporate sustainable local economies. Unless we and local communities support both rural and urban post offices, that simply will not happen.

Many members have talked about the UK Government, which has a crucial role to play in keeping the subsidy arrangements fair and in ensuring that Government services continue to be delivered through post offices. It is important that any proposal to change arrangements in Scotland is not decided on until the Parliament has reconvened after the election and we have had a full parliamentary opportunity to scrutinise the impact of any potential changes.

However, we cannot rely on Westminster alone. Allan Wilson, who, sadly, is not with us this morning, acknowledged the following in a parliamentary answer to me two weeks ago. I will play the role of Allan Wilson, although not in his inimitable style. He said:

"community engagement is vital to ensure that people have a say in the future of their communities' development and that, where post offices play an important role in community development, there should be full consultation and engagement with communities."—[*Official Report*, 7 December 2006; c 30163.]

I agree. That approach must be strengthened and developed further, because protecting post offices and wider local economies requires action by those who are reliant on them.

I would like local businesses, in conjunction with community councils, local authorities and Scottish Enterprise to prepare local plans to keep the heart beating in their high streets. There are good examples of rural community-based initiatives, from Gartmore and Fintry, which Sylvia Jackson mentioned, to Blackford in Perthshire, where community action to support post offices has created hubs where both public and private

services can be delivered together. I want the Executive to fund a much more structured form of support to communities that need to retain those hubs to prevent the degeneration of their communities. In the words of the minister, a community development approach—something for which Scottish Enterprise is not exactly renowned—is required.

11:04

Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD): Post offices are the lifeblood of communities in both rural and urban areas, particularly when they are combined with other services, such as the local shop. However, over the past two decades they have been closing at a rate of more than 300 a year. In many communities in my constituency, the post office is the last remaining service—if we do not count the school—so post offices in my rural communities play a particularly crucial role. They have an existence value in holding communities together by giving them a focal point. They also provide vital face-to-face access to Government, postal and commercial services for communities, most of which no longer have a local bank branch.

According to Postcomm, 90 per cent of rural sub-post offices are unprofitable. It is vital that the true social value of the network is considered, as well as its economic value, when looking at its long-term future.

The sub-post office network has been in steady decline. Sub-post offices often have no value as businesses because of their uncertain future, but the premises from which they are run have a high value as purely private residences. When owners want to retire, they cannot sell their businesses and post offices close. That is exactly what is just about to happen in Old Rayne in my constituency.

The maintenance of a comprehensive network of sub-post offices covering the whole country, right into the most remote and rural communities, depended on the wide range of services that the Government chose to deliver through them. Tragically, the UK Government is washing its hands of the post office network. Its approach has been a combination of neglect and death by a thousand cuts.

The UK Government has directly or indirectly overseen the post office losing television licence, vehicle excise duty and passport authentication work. The transfer of benefit and pension payments to direct payment into bank accounts resulted in a loss of £400 million in income. Although the Government saved money, it had no proper consideration for the wider consequences. How the transfer was done was pretty ruthless too. Postmasters were strictly forbidden to do anything to dissuade their customers from moving to direct

payments. That the take-up of the Post Office card account was far greater than the Government expected reflects the difficulties that people face in opening basic bank accounts and the advantages that they see in using the post office. During the period 2003 to 2010, the card account contract is worth £1 billion in income for post offices.

Richard Lochhead: If the Liberal Democrats take the issue so seriously, why are their ministers absent from today's important debate?

Nora Radcliffe: That is not worth answering.

The UK Government will not extend its card contract beyond 2010, claiming that it never intended to renew the POCA contract. That was news to the long-suffering postmasters, who feel betrayed yet again. It was news to the users of card accounts, who have now got used to them, and it was news to the House of Commons. The Trade and Industry Select Committee pointed out that most people assumed that the contract would be renegotiated after 2010, that a lot of commercial decisions were made on that basis, and that there has been a real sense of betrayal. I confirm that in spades from a survey of the post offices and sub-post offices in Gordon, carried out in conjunction with my Westminster colleague Malcolm Bruce.

On 14 December, the UK Government announced plans for post office restructuring that it expects to lead to the closure of a further 2,500 post office branches by 2009. Liberal Democrats are calling on the Government to stop the unnecessary post office closure programme and instead—as it could—free the business from restrictive regulation, invest in the future of the network and stop removing government business to safeguard our post offices.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): You should finish now, Ms Radcliffe.

Nora Radcliffe: Post offices play a crucial role in the community, particularly in rural areas, and must be protected. Much could and should be done to maintain a unique network that is a valuable asset. If we do not use it, it will be lost and that will be a tragedy.

11:09

Ms Rosemary Byrne (South of Scotland) (Sol): I welcome the debate, which provides an opportunity to discuss the future of the post office network.

Over the past few months I have visited a number of sub-post offices, both rural and urban, in my region. Their concerns are similar. Age Concern carried out a poll that showed that 99 per cent of older people in rural areas consider the local post office to be a lifeline and more than half

of them feared that closures would leave them more isolated. Likewise, in urban areas, the sub-post office staff said that the post office was a lifeline for the elderly, disabled and vulnerable. That applies particularly to the most deprived areas of our towns. Help the Aged points out in its briefing that post office closures will have the greatest impact on people who are already vulnerable to social and financial exclusion.

Of the post offices that have already closed, 76 per cent had a shop attached and 82 per cent of those shops closed when the post office did. Those lifelines are being lost in our communities with little reference to the community campaigning that is going on. The Dumfries and Galloway elderly forum campaigned hard to save rural post offices as well as the main post office in Dumfries, but it was unsuccessful. It has also lobbied extremely hard for Post Office card accounts to be retained. I hope that someone somewhere is listening to those people, because the situation is similar in Irvine and Kilwinning, where the main post offices have closed despite a huge campaign to keep them open.

It seems that whatever the voice of the people is, it is not being listened to. I note—and I am sure that the Dumfries and Galloway elderly forum and the elderly forum in Irvine and Kilwinning will also note—that no ministers are here today to listen to this extremely important debate.

The withdrawal of the Post Office card account could cost the network at least £100 million a year in lost income. Add to that the impact of the loss of services such as TV licence contracts and passport processing.

There are on-going reductions in services, job losses, reductions in wages and a worsening of conditions. The closure of main post offices and the transfer of services to Spar shops and so on have meant that conditions have worsened and wages have been reduced. That has a direct impact on the local economy, as Mark Ruskell said. The post offices are a vibrant part of the community and make a difference to the local economy and small businesses.

Post offices are frequently the only place to access cash locally; only 4 per cent of villages have a bank, but 60 per cent have a post office. Many elderly people do not have bank accounts either. Some 60 per cent of bank current accounts are still not accessible in post offices. There is absolutely no question but that opening up post office services could save them. Some 4.3 million people use the Post Office card account each week and around 1 million older people in the UK do not have bank accounts. We can address that and save the post offices, but we have to ensure that someone somewhere is listening. At the moment, not much listening is going on in here

and there is certainly no listening to the communities that are campaigning to save these services.

11:13

Alasdair Morgan (South of Scotland) (SNP):

One of the roots of the problem is that there has been not a lack of Government support but a lack of consistent Government support for the post office network over the years, and there has been ambivalence about the post office. John Swinney alluded to the fact that when benefits payments through giro books were withdrawn, the facility to get payments via the Post Office card account was introduced, but people had to jump through all sorts of hoops to get them. They had to phone up to get the application form, and then submit it separately. People thought that it was much easier simply to have the money paid to them directly. Of course, the situation then becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy: the Government can say, "Ah—but no one is using the post office."

The lunacy is that one part of the Government is paying the post office network a subsidy because it is not economic and another part—the TV licence payment collection system—is privatising its operations and taking money away from the post office, presumably so that the Government has to put more subsidy in at the other end. That is the economics of the madhouse.

When Stephen Byers launched the Post Office card account, there was no suggestion that it was time limited and would be around for only 10 years. The House of Commons understood that it would be around for ever, but the project suddenly became time limited and the Government has had to do a U-turn. What has happened has resulted in huge uncertainty for people who use post offices and for people who run them.

One of the biggest causes of post office closures is that replacement postmasters or postmistresses cannot be found when postmasters or postmistresses retire. There is no wonder that they cannot be found if people do not know whether there will be a business for them to run. That cause is, of course, the easiest cause for the Post Office to defend. It says, "We can't get anyone to do the job," and the Government says, "Nobody wants to run post offices." They simply wring their hands as if the matter had nothing to do with them, but the problems that we face stem from the complete lack of a coherent Government strategy. We must say what post offices are for first and then decide what action to take.

The Post Office was given a duty not to make avoidable closures after 1997, but nobody defined "avoidable closure". Without it being said what

post offices should exist for, that duty meant nothing.

Euan Robson spoke about an issue that has not been explored nearly enough—sharing of services. The odd post office is run from a pub or a back room and services are occasionally shared, but no coherent strategy on that exists. Things simply happen in certain places by accident. We must consider the local delivery of Government and council services in rural areas, including post office services, and we must try to ensure that all of them—even though they may not be economical—are run sensibly. We must see post offices as part of our infrastructure. We do not stop tarmacking rural roads—at least some of them—because not many cars run on them, although we may have to deal with that matter once road charging kicks in. Post offices are as vital for local industry as roads are. As long as we continue to consider the post office network in isolation or simply as part of a business rather than as part of our essential infrastructure, we will have to come back to Parliament to fight to defend it. We must take a coherent approach.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to winding-up speeches. Carolyn Leckie has a tight four minutes.

11:17

Carolyn Leckie: I will do my best to stay within that time.

I want to pick up on issues that I did not have time to talk about earlier. A big argument, on the wider impact of post offices on the economy even in the current political and economic circumstances, has been missed in the debate. Members have said that the last shop in the village will often go when the post office closes, but post offices bring wider economic benefits. Research by the New Economics Foundation shows that for every £10 a post office earns, it generates £16.20 for its local economy, including £6.20 in direct spending on local goods and services. That means that each post office will contribute around £310,000 to its local economy each year, of which £120,000 will be direct spending on local goods and services. Those figures are based on an in-depth analysis of urban post offices in Manchester. Figures for many areas of Scotland have not been quantified or examined.

The withdrawal of post office services has a massive impact. [*Interruption.*] The Executive should take into account that impact and be prepared to take action within its remit. Obviously, I would prefer the Executive to have full powers over such matters. It does not have such powers, but it could provide support and funding to help communities to establish community post offices.

Such an approach would be possible, viable and realistic in the short term.

It is disgraceful that no Scottish minister is in the chamber, as my amendment and other amendments refer to the Scottish Executive. My amendment refers to something that the Scottish Executive could do using its current powers, but no minister is here to examine or to rubbish my arguments or suggestions or even to agree with me—it is Christmas, after all.

Communities in Scotland that are threatened with the closures and loss of services, which threaten the viability of those communities, should be really angry. When it comes to putting their cross on the ballot paper, I hope they will let the Executive parties know that.

In turning to the SNP contribution, I return to what I was saying at the outset. Although I agree with much of what John Swinney, Alasdair Morgan and other SNP members said, I disagree with them that the problem stems from the Government's incompetence, its inconsistent support for the post office network, or from a lack of joined-up government. The Government has been very competent in promoting a right-wing neo-liberal offensive on public services. It has achieved more for that right-wing ideology and for the interests of big business than Thatcher did. She started the neo-liberal offensive, but Labour has continued it. Labour has used the lessons that it learned from Thatcher's direct, confrontational and wolfish style—all we have had from it is a change into sheep's clothing. Labour has continued the same process and, indeed, it has accelerated it, which is why the Tories are in bother over the issue; they have no ground.

Will Labour members join us today? Will they at least support the 34 Labour MPs at Westminster who supported the return of TV licence payments to post offices?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You should be finishing now, Ms Leckie.

Carolyn Leckie: What is the position of Labour MSPs? None of them has commented on that. Will Labour members support the position of the 39 Labour MPs who opposed the franchising of Crown post offices to WH Smith? What is their position on further privatisation of the post office network? Labour members have been remarkably silent on that.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Before I call Jeremy Purvis, I remind members that their mobile phones have to be switched off, not switched to silent.

11:22

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): There is no doubt that there is no agreement between the Labour Party and the Liberal Democrats on the decision of the UK Government on this matter. There is agreement that reform is needed, but we are very clear that the way in which the UK Government has set about it is the wrong way. I am disappointed that the Labour amendment is not clearer in stating that and I am disappointed that the SNP motion is not clearer in stating that the Government is taking the wrong way forward. It should be doing that and not calling for representations to be made.

There is a requirement for the types of reforms that Alasdair Morgan highlighted. For example, in my constituency, constituents in Ettrick Bridge should have more central and local government services delivered to them through the post office. If services were combined in that way, the entire Ettrick valley could receive those services locally. In Innerleithen, planning should now be under way on future services so that there is no repeat of what happened in Nora Radcliffe's constituency, where the post office is the last service to remain. Given that the police station in Innerleithen has closed, the time is right to start on a real community plan. The UK Government's decision on its consultation is the wrong way forward; it serves only to work against the community planning approach.

On reform, it is clear that the Royal Mail has outdated sorting equipment: only 50 per cent of mail is sorted electronically, whereas 90 per cent of the mail that its competitors in TNT or Deutsche Post handle is sorted electronically. The Royal Mail estimates that it needs a £2.2 billion investment if it is to modernise. The Postal Services Commission, the regulator, allowed only £1.2 billion, of which £900 million is to come by way of a Government loan. That is woefully inadequate investment, particularly when the Royal Mail is hidebound by regulation. It is interesting to note that the DTI consultation majors on the loss of £4 million a week for the network. That should have been put in the context of the Royal Mail Group's operating profit in 2005-06 of £355 million, on record revenues of £9 billion.

As Parliament has heard, from April 2003, the Government started paying benefits and state pensions directly into customer's bank accounts and established the Post Office card account through Post Office Ltd. One of the problems with the card account is that it has been a success: 3.7 million Department for Work and Pensions customers have continued to use post offices through opening a Post Office card account. In January 2006, the DWP made it known that it would not renew the contract for the card account

when it comes to an end in 2010. As Alasdair Morgan pointed out, the Select Committee on Trade and Industry had received no information from the Government that the decision to establish the card was a temporary one. In its report of 30 October, it makes clear its disappointment on the matter. There continues to be a need for clarification on the Government's position, post 2010, on the Post Office card account. It is the second-highest earner—second only to postal work—for rural post offices, so the decision on its future is crucial to continuation of the network. The uncertainty is compounding the reduction in business and footfall that we have heard about.

The Select Committee on Trade and Industry was clear that the rural network is supported not for purely economic reasons. In its report, it states:

"If the Post Office network were just a commercial entity, it would not deserve to be supported by Government. However, it fulfils a wider community need. In many places Post Office branches serve as the heart of the community."

Another paragraph from the report states:

"Some Post Office branches, especially those in rural areas, will always remain unviable. We believe that it is vital that across the whole of Government there is a clear recognition of the role that Post Offices play in delivering Government objectives in the community."

The Government in London is failing to recognise post offices' role. Its consultation paper is seriously flawed and needs to be rejected. Parliament should be clear about stating that, rather than just asking the Executive to make representations to the Government, as the SNP has asked us to do.

11:26

Derek Brownlee (South of Scotland) (Con): Most of us would agree that post offices play a vital part in communities, especially in rural areas. I am sure that the communities in the south of Scotland provide a better example of that than most, whether we are talking about those in East Lothian and the Borders or those in Ayrshire and Dumfries and Galloway in the west. As Murdo Fraser said, the continuation of the post office network is not just an economic issue, but a social issue. Instead of trying to reduce the services that post offices offer, we should be giving greater consideration to what we can do to expand their role to make them viable.

Murdo Fraser mentioned the consultation timescale, which is worth remarking on again. I am sure that we would all agree that the Government at Westminster has a keen eye for timing. The fact that the consultation responses will be considered while Scotland is voting and will not be published until after the May election is highly convenient for the Executive parties.

Carolyn Leckie: Will the member take an intervention?

Derek Brownlee: No—I want to make some progress.

Many members have expressed surprise that no Executive minister is present to respond to the debate. It appears that we have moved on from the parliamentary convention of a few weeks ago—when we were told that in Opposition debates, it was appropriate only for a deputy minister to respond—to a new convention, whereby it is appropriate for no one to respond on behalf of the Executive.

Only 15 days ago, the Executive found a minister—Rhona Brankin—to respond to a debate on post offices. Let us remind ourselves of what she said then, before the consultation document had been published. Speaking on behalf of the Executive, she said:

“we have made absolutely clear to United Kingdom Government colleagues the need for future arrangements for post offices to acknowledge the wider economic and social dimension”.

She said that the importance of the network to Scotland had been raised with ministers in London and accepted that there is a need for the UK Government and the Scottish Government to adopt a joined-up approach. She went on to say:

“I am pleased that UK Government colleagues have acknowledged the force of those arguments”.—[*Official Report*, 6 December; c 30090-91.]

A week later, the Government announced that 2,500 post offices throughout the UK would close.

Duncan McNeil made the fair point that in Scotland we have a disproportionate share of the number of branches, but he did not say whether we would have a disproportionate share of the number of closures. Even if we have just a proportionate share of the number of closures, a significant number of post offices throughout the country will close, which is why people the length and breadth of Scotland are concerned.

Mr McNeil: Will the member give way?

Derek Brownlee: I want to come on to the member's coalition partners, if I may.

Euan Robson said that it was not the Liberal Democrats' policy to privatise the Post Office. That may be true, but he might have been dancing on the head of a pin, because the information on the save our post offices campaign on the Liberal Democrats' website says:

“Our proposals would create a new ownership model for Royal Mail which would allow it to borrow to invest without it having to compete with schools and hospitals as it is no longer wholly owned by the public sector.”

If that is not privatisation, I do not know what is. Euan Robson does not accept the force of the argument for Scottish Water, but he accepts it for Royal Mail.

Jeremy Purvis said that the Royal Mail needs to invest £2 billion in automation, but the Lib Dem save our post offices campaign says that that £2 billion is earmarked to keep Post Office branches open. Is there a £2 billion black hole in the spending plans of the Liberal Democrats? They cannot claim that the Royal Mail and Post Office are separate and then try to spend the same £2 billion twice. It is time for clarity from both Executive parties and it is time for an Executive response to the consultation, so that we can find out precisely what the Executive parties are saying to the Government at Westminster.

11:30

Mr Alasdair Morrison (Western Isles) (Lab): I welcomed Alistair Darling's statement last week in the House of Commons—the primary forum for a debate of this nature—in which he set out a clear strategy for the preservation of our national post office network.

We all appreciate that the network must change and adapt if it is to meet the needs of citizens in 21st century Britain. The notion that Government can ignore how citizens choose to do business, which some members have promoted, is laughable.

Of course we must acknowledge—as many members of all parties have done—the post office network's role in the economic and social well-being of our islands. In my constituency in the Western Isles, some 64 post offices serve 28,000 people. Some members' comments on rural Scotland seemed to suggest that people who are fortunate enough to live in rural or island Scotland are incapable of embracing new ways of doing business in an ever-changing world, but I can happily report that my constituents are more than capable of embracing change in their lives and work and in how they engage with public services.

On the island of Great Bernera, off the Isle of Lewis, the community faces the prospect of losing its post office. However, because the community is part of the initiative at the edge programme, it has found innovative and sound ways of delivering public services. At the modernised village hall site, the local authority has based a couple of development officers, the health board has constructed a surgery for visiting general practitioners and the fire board bases its volunteers' fire tender. The pre-school facility and local historical society are on the same campus. The approach demonstrates sensible and pragmatic thinking about how to share costs. Such

innovative and practical action helps to sustain and maintain services in areas that are distant from the headquarters of the council, the fire board, the health board and the Post Office.

For far too long, public agencies have presided over the demise of many communities, but as a result of programmes such as the initiative at the edge, agencies are working together to provide services in places like the Western Isles and the west Highlands—all it took was insistence that public servants sit down together to discuss their plans and priorities and how to refigure and deliver services. The postal service is no different. It must ensure that it finds ways of providing services throughout the country. It is doing that, but four million fewer people are using post offices than were using them two years ago, as I think Duncan McNeil said.

John Swinney, who moved the motion, blamed Government and claimed that Government has decided to “engineer the closure” of post offices. He did not acknowledge the £150 million per annum that has been paid to post offices since 1997, although his colleague Alasdair Morgan had the good grace to acknowledge that contribution. Mr Swinney went on to berate citizens for using modern methods to receive pensions and benefits. He said that the Government should encourage more transactions. He wants people in nationalist Scotland to go back to queuing in the rain for their pensions and benefits—[*Interruption.*] I applaud Duncan McNeil’s humorous dissection of the fallacies that the nationalists promote. I hear the nationalists shouting from the sidelines, but I will not comment on the dreary and mournful dirge from Richard Lochhead.

Sylvia Jackson rightly referred to the prospect of substantial investment, subject to European state-aid approval, of up to £1.7 billion over the next five years, to support the post office network and enable it to be rationalised, modernised and placed on a more stable footing.

The UK Government wants the Post Office to identify opportunities and to set up 500 innovative outlets for small communities, which will include mobile post offices. For 60 years, the Royal Bank of Scotland has provided banking services to Western Isles villages. Last year it bought a new fleet of mobile banks, which bristle with the latest technology. Although there is understandable attachment to bricks and mortar—or stone and lime, in the Western Isles—we must embrace new ways of doing business.

I hope that Alistair Darling, in discussion with the Post Office, will urge it to extend the mobile post office pilot, which currently runs in Wick, serving five villages. I have great confidence in the secretary of state and his commitment to the post office network. I urge him to examine the Western

Isles and west Highlands in considering ways of delivering postal services in rural Scotland. I urge members to support Sylvia Jackson’s amendment.

11:35

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): I congratulate some of the many members who have spoken and who made serious comments in what is an important debate on issues that impact particularly on vulnerable people and communities. I exclude from that Duncan McNeil, with his disgraceful trivialisation of the debate. I intend to circulate his flippant speech to postmasters throughout Scotland for their contemplation.

Mr McNeil: Will the member take an intervention?

Christine Grahame: You are hoist by your own petard, sunshine.

I do not need to exclude Government ministers from my congratulations, because the Minister for Environment and Rural Development and the Minister for Communities, both of whom could have been involved in the debate, have excluded themselves. Scotland’s rural communities will not fail to notice that fact. In previous debates on the issue in Parliament, the Minister for Communities has spoken and, in John Swinney’s members’ business debate on the issue, the Deputy Minister for Environment and Rural Development was here. However, no minister has been present during today’s debate. That is an insult to Parliament and to Scotland’s vulnerable people and communities. I point out to Euan Robson that social exclusion and vulnerable communities are not reserved matters—Derek Brownlee was right to draw attention to that.

As many other members did, John Swinney made clear the vital role that the post office has as a hub in our communities. He and others also made it plain that there has not been—to use an abominable expression—joined-up thinking between the various Westminster departments that have eroded the stability of rural post offices. As Alasdair Morgan rightly said, that has resulted in people retiring and no one else taking up their businesses, because people do not know whether there will be a proper business to run. I can think of many examples of that, although, for once, I will speak not about the Borders, but about Flotta, where my sister is the sole and head teacher in the primary school. Flotta post office, which is in the middle of that rural area, is the centre of information, the local shop and a tourist information centre. It is extremely important to the community, which is a vulnerable one that has just managed to hang on to its school, thanks to my sister.

Richard Lochhead raised the issue of rural schools and communities that are fighting to keep their schools. I will have to mention the Borders: Oxtoun has kept its school, but the question is whether it will keep its sub-post office. Many places are fighting on that issue. When people are deciding on a place to live and see a village that has a school and a post office with a shop attached, they think that it is a living place. However, when they go to a village that has no school, post office or shop, they pass through. Many of the people who live in such places leave, too. The people who are left are the elderly, the disabled and the vulnerable, who cannot move and who will have to go long distances to access post office services.

That is made plain in research that Postwatch Scotland has carried out. One disabled customer who would have to travel between 8km and 16km to the nearest post office said:

"It would cause great difficulty in more ways than can be described as I am disabled. Travelling alone causes undue and unnecessary pain and suffering."

Another elderly customer said:

"It would be over 40 miles in a boat to collect pension and get any cash. Would be unable to do any posting."

Those are the people who should be protected and looked after. We should make their communities thrive. We must not think of the system of post offices only in terms of a balance sheet, with debits and credits in bold black figures on the paper; we need to think of the more subtle effects that the system has in keeping communities hearty.

Help the Aged in Scotland supports John Swinney's motion fully. It has stated that it welcomes and supports John Swinney's motion on the threat to the rural post office network in Scotland and that it has campaigned for some time on issues relating to the future of the post office network, including a recent campaign on the future of the Post Office card account. Many members have mentioned the card account.

I return to the most disgraceful matter at hand, which is that no minister has sat through any part of the debate, contributed to it or responded to the serious issues that members of different parties have raised. I hope that I never have to experience a similar situation again in Parliament. It will not be forgotten.

Question Time

SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

General Questions

11:40

Careers Scotland

1. Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive when it expects to make an announcement about the future of Careers Scotland. (S2O-11503)

The Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Allan Wilson): Following consultation, the Executive remains committed to transferring Careers Scotland out of Scottish Enterprise. In January we will begin a full options appraisal on the future structure of Careers Scotland involving all key stakeholders. In the meantime, we are asking Scottish Enterprise to make Careers Scotland a more distinct entity within its structure.

A further announcement will be made in the new year and we will look to implement the outcomes of the options appraisal from summer 2007 onwards.

Alex Neil: What are the options, and can the minister guarantee that the Executive will break the habit of a lifetime and announce the outcome to the Parliament instead of the Sunday papers?

Allan Wilson: We certainly intend to announce the outcome of the options appraisal to Parliament before any other source. I give a personal commitment to keep the member and his committee fully informed in that process.

The options are as considered in the consultation document. To an extent, we are continuing in the same general direction of travel, even if the pace has altered somewhat. That is the correct decision to take in the context of current and future events.

Christine May (Central Fife) (Lab): Does the minister appreciate that a number of places in Scotland have become proportionately more deprived, according to recent statistical evidence? Does he agree that good careers advice for young people in those areas of Scotland is extremely important? Will particular attention be paid to those areas in the options appraisal that is being done?

Allan Wilson: I take the view that one of Careers Scotland's key functions is to focus its activity on those who need its guidance services most, for example, 16 to 19-year-olds who are not

in education, employment or training. There is a need to refocus its activities in our secondary schools, in relation to pupils in secondary 2 to secondary 6. It is important that those who are in most need of careers guidance get it at that stage and that it is properly focused on their future career prospects.

Crime (Town Centres)

2. Mr Frank McAveety (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what action it will take to reduce crime in town centres. (S2O-11562)

The Minister for Justice (Cathy Jamieson): The Scottish Executive supports the police, community safety partnerships and antisocial behaviour teams in preventing and tackling crime. We recognise that many town and city centres face additional public order issues at weekends and in the run-up to the festive period. Last week, I announced additional funding of £600,000 for community safety partnerships in four cities and eight towns to help improve safety on our streets.

Mr McAveety: I understand that, in the course of her duties as an MSP, the minister recently had an opportunity to have a Saturday night out in Kilmarnock. I hope that she had a quiet evening, but Margaret Jamieson suggests otherwise.

Will the minister give an assurance that the resources that have been found for those initiatives will continue, so that local authorities, local retailers, the police and many other agencies can continue to work in partnership to ensure that, when people go into our town and city centres to enjoy themselves—particularly over the festive season—they will be free of the fear of crime?

Cathy Jamieson: I should put on the record the context of the night out that Mr McAveety mentioned. Margaret Jamieson and I were the guests of the police, who invited us to examine the operation of policing activities in the town. I know that Pauline McNeill took part in the same initiative in Glasgow, but I think that she had a bit more staying power and was able to stay out further into the early hours of the morning than Margaret Jamieson and I did.

If the new measures—not only the important measure of having more police officers on the street, but measures such as taxi marshals, stewarding and so on—prove effective, I would want to replicate them in future.

Alasdair Morgan (South of Scotland) (SNP): Is the minister happy that the police have sufficient resources to ensure that there is an adequate police presence at the weekends in our smaller towns?

Cathy Jamieson: I remind the member that we have invested record levels of resources in Scotland's police. The figure now stands at more than £1.1 billion per year. Every police force now has additional police officers whom they can deploy and additional support staff.

It is, of course, for the chief constable in each area to secure the best use of those resources. I know that Alasdair Morgan has a particular interest in the south of Scotland and Dumfries and Galloway, and the local chief constable has always looked to ensure that small towns are adequately policed as well as larger ones.

Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con): Does the minister agree that, if resources were targeted at recruiting full-time police officers instead of community wardens, the possibility of increased police numbers and high-visibility policing in town centres could become a permanent reality?

Cathy Jamieson: I am sorry to hear Margaret Mitchell once again decry the use of community wardens, which is one of our most popular initiatives. As I travel the length and breadth of Scotland, I am told that areas that have community wardens want to keep them and that areas that do not have them yet want to get them. We should take that seriously.

The use of community wardens is not a substitute for front-line policing but complements that. Community wardens add value. They provide a different service and one that our communities want. The Tories are on the wrong side of the argument on the matter.

Accessible Buses

3. Mr Charlie Gordon (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it encourages transport partnerships and local authorities to specify the provision of vehicles that are fully accessible to passengers whose mobility is impaired, when procuring subsidised bus services. (S2O-11552)

The Minister for Transport (Tavish Scott): In awarding grants under the rural public passenger transport grant scheme, we ask local authorities to specify vehicle standards. It is a requirement of grants made under the rural community transport initiative that vehicles are fully accessible.

Mr Gordon: Before the Strathclyde Passenger Transport Authority was abolished, it managed to procure low-floor, accessible vehicles for 90 per cent of its subsidised bus services. That shows that, if there are contracts of reasonable length, the bus industry in Scotland can respond to the agenda. Vehicle standards are formally reserved to Westminster, but I would like the minister to encourage the new transport partnerships and

local authorities—in the context of subsidised social services, school transport and the increased use of buses by senior citizens under the free transport scheme—to take a procurement approach that leads to fully-accessible buses throughout the country.

Tavish Scott: I recognise the points that Mr Gordon makes, and certainly his point about what has been achieved in the west of Scotland. It is important to recognise and build on that success. He makes a number of pertinent points about the length of contracts and what we can do in relation to school transport contracts and the national concessionary fares scheme. As he knows, we are investing a considerable amount of public money in the delivery of a successful scheme throughout Scotland, and in doing that we can work with the bus operators to deliver more buses of the kind that people have come to expect and wish to see in all parts of the country.

We will consider the point about contracts and I am happy to keep Mr Gordon up to date with the progress that we make both in proactive discussions and in any formal contract arrangements that we make in future.

Mr David Davidson (North East Scotland) (Con): In large parts of Scotland, disabled people cannot access bus services because there is simply none available to them. What plans does the Executive have to ensure that community transport groups are supplied with the correct vehicles to offer a service to those people?

Tavish Scott: Mr Davidson will be familiar with the national transport strategy and, more important, the bus action plan within that. I stress the use of the word “action” in dealing with gaps that may exist in different parts of the country. Many of these matters are to be built from the ground up. In other words, it is for local authorities and community groups to design the services that they want and to consider the type of bus that best meets their needs.

Clearly, a 50-seater bus will not necessarily suit more rural locations, because of the roads and, more important, the level of need. We have invested heavily in facilities through a number of mechanisms, and we will continue to do so. I would be happy to consider any particular examples that David Davidson might have.

Festive Recycling

4. Irene Oldfather (Cunninghame South) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what action it is taking to encourage recycling over the festive period. (S2O-11571)

The Deputy Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Rhona Brankin): We are supporting the Woodland Trust’s Christmas card

recycling scheme, and a number of local authorities run schemes to recycle Christmas trees. We also support the waste aware Scotland campaign, which, through its website, provides advice to the public on how to recycle wrapping paper, decorations, cards and Christmas trees. More generally, recycling facilities across Scotland for use throughout the year—not just at Christmas—have improved as a result of strategic waste fund investment.

Irene Oldfather: Will the minister join me in commending the work of North Ayrshire Council, whose let’s get it sorted this Christmas and Frosty the Snowman web links encourage both young and old to get involved in the recycling of Christmas waste? Does she agree that involving primary-school-age pupils in recycling will pay particular dividends for the environment in future years?

Rhona Brankin: I thank Irene Oldfather for her question. It is helpful at Christmas time to remind ourselves of our responsibilities with regard to waste, and I thank her for her commitment to raising rates of recycling in general. I am delighted to hear that North Ayrshire Council is using a creative, innovative way to get the message across to young people. As we all know, young people then get the message across to their parents. I congratulate North Ayrshire Council. It is perhaps as the result of such innovative schemes involving young people that North Ayrshire’s recycling rates are above the Scottish average.

Road Traffic Levels 2021

5. Mark Ballard (Lothians) (Green): To ask the Scottish Executive what it expects road traffic levels to be in 2021, in light of the statement in Audit Scotland’s overview of the performance of transport in Scotland that “latest forecasts estimate that traffic will grow by a further 27 per cent” by 2021. (S2O-11574)

The Minister for Transport (Tavish Scott): The latest projections using the transport model for Scotland suggest that traffic volumes will grow by 22 per cent between 2005 and 2022. The national transport strategy is addressing traffic growth on a number of fronts through three strategic outcomes: improving journey times and connections; reducing emissions; and improving the quality, accessibility and affordability of public transport.

Mark Ballard: The national transport strategy that the minister mentions retains the aspirational target

“to stabilise road traffic volumes at 2001 levels by 2021”.

Can he explain what an “aspirational target” is? Does he think that that aspirational target will be

met through the current provisions of the national transport strategy?

Tavish Scott: We will strongly work towards meeting it. Under the national transport strategy—I hope that Mr Ballard might give us some credit for this—we will develop a carbon balance sheet to develop the carbon impact of projects and policies. That measure is very much designed to make progress in this area, in addition to strategic environmental assessments, which I know Mr Ballard's party supports and which will govern the introduction of transport policies and specific projects of a nationally significant scale across the country. Those are important developments in tackling this serious issue.

It is important also to reflect on the spend and on the spending profile, which has changed since the coalition was formed. We are moving towards, and delivering on, a target of 70 per cent of our transport spend on public transport. I strongly argue that, over the longer term, that will make a considerable difference.

Mr Kenny MacAskill (Lothians) (SNP): The minister will accept that one way to tackle rising car use is to promote public transport. Rather than investing in a flawed tram scheme, would it not be better value to promote and support an excellent bus service here in the city of Edinburgh? Is he aware that, for the £700 million that is likely to be the cost of the city of Edinburgh tram scheme, every bus in the whole of the Lothians could be replaced with state-of-the-art, low-boarding, low-emissions vehicles, and the entire service in the city of Edinburgh could be run free for seven years? Would that not be a better investment of public funds?

Tavish Scott: Mr MacAskill flip-flops from one side of the argument to the other. He is on record as supporting Edinburgh trams, but I heard him on Forth One just the other morning saying that he was against them and that they were a complete waste of money. We disagree with that view, and in the City of Edinburgh Council there will be cross-party disagreement with that view in the coming days when the council supports the scheme. The scheme will be important for our capital city. It represents a vision for our capital; clearly the Scottish National Party has none. We will build on that vision and ensure that the scheme is an important contribution to improving public transport choices around Scotland. That is the decision that this Government has taken.

Oil and Gas Industry Workforce

6. Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what action it is taking to ensure that a skilled workforce is available to the oil and gas industry. (S2O-11544)

The Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Allan Wilson): We are working through PILOT, the joint industry-Government taskforce, on the key issues that are vital for the oil and gas industry's future success. PILOT and the industry, together with Scottish Enterprise, are working together to deliver a range of training programmes that have focused on companies' immediate need for technicians, new starts and riggers. These include the accelerate programme for technicians, which has successfully attracted 646 new recruits, with 96 per cent having completed their studies within the time schedule.

Richard Baker: Does the minister agree that addressing skills shortages in the oil and gas sector—an issue identified both by operators and by offshore contractors—is crucial to the sector's future growth? I am sure that he will agree that his announcement that Labour is committed to an oil and gas skills academy in Aberdeen is an important boost to the industry.

Does the minister further agree that the academy will benefit the industry, in contrast to what would happen under the economic instability that would be caused by the separation plans of the SNP? Those plans would threaten the industry's success in Scotland.

Allan Wilson: I have much pleasure in agreeing with my colleague. He has put his finger on the pulse of the political issues of the day.

The announcement that we made today was a political announcement on behalf of the Labour Party; it does not represent a partnership commitment per se. However, I hope that we can build consensus across the chamber—perhaps even with our friends and colleagues in the nationalist party—that an oil and gas skills academy, with its hub in Aberdeen and with spokes across Scotland, would be of great benefit to the industry. The idea and concept came from the industry itself.

Ms Maureen Watt (North East Scotland) (SNP): Does the minister agree that it would help the oil and gas industry in the recruitment and retention of its workforce if Labour politicians stopped saying that oil was running out? Saying that is a vain attempt to scare Scottish voters into thinking that Scotland is too poor to look after itself. If those politicians said that there was still much oil to come out of the North sea and that the skills and technology learned in the North sea were exportable worldwide, it would be much easier for the industry to retain its workforce.

Allan Wilson: The Executive does not need to scare the Scottish people; the nationalists do a good enough job themselves—which is why they

are continually rejected by the Scottish people. However, that is another story.

There can be no denying the fact that oil and gas fields in the North sea are maturing. However, it remains the case that the oil and gas industry represents a good and positive career choice for generations of young Scots still to be born. We look forward to the production of oil and gas in the North sea benefiting the United Kingdom Exchequer for a long time to come.

Police Numbers (Clydesdale)

7. Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what impact the Faslane 365 demonstrations are having on local police numbers in Clydesdale. (S2O-11550)

The Minister for Justice (Cathy Jamieson): One thousand and ninety eight tours of duty were conducted by Strathclyde community police officers at Faslane over the 12 months from the beginning of November 2005. That is the equivalent of about three community police officers per day. The deployment of police officers in Clydesdale is, like that in the rest of Strathclyde, a matter for the chief constable. Strathclyde has benefited, as have all Scottish police forces, from the record levels of resources that we have invested in the police.

Karen Gillon: I thank the Executive for its investment in the police force. However, the minister must be aware that—in her constituency as in mine—this type of demonstration is beginning to have an impact on local police numbers. Will she meet me to discuss how to make progress on such matters? I accept that the road needs to be kept open, but the impact on local communities is beginning to bite. That should be taken into consideration by the chief constable.

Cathy Jamieson: As I indicated in response to similar concerns that were raised by Paul Martin MSP, responsibility for policing is primarily for chief constables. I am sure that members would wish to make representations directly to them, but I am more than happy to discuss with Karen Gillon and, indeed, Paul Martin the particular issues that are relevant to their local constituency areas.

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): Before First Minister's questions, members will wish to join me in welcoming to Parliament His Excellency René J Mujica Cantelar, the Cuban ambassador to the United Kingdom. [*Applause.*]

First Minister's Question Time

12:00

Prime Minister (Meetings)

1. Nicola Sturgeon (Glasgow) (SNP): I wish the First Minister a speedy recovery and everyone else a very happy Christmas.

To ask the Deputy First Minister when he—or indeed the First Minister—will next meet the Prime Minister and what issues they will discuss. (S2F-2629)

The Deputy First Minister and Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Nicol Stephen): I add my good wishes to those of Nicola Sturgeon and wish Nicola Sturgeon a merry Christmas and a very happy, prosperous and successful new year in her continuing role as the leader of the Opposition in the Scottish Parliament.

Neither the First Minister nor I have any plans to meet the Prime Minister before the new year.

Nicola Sturgeon: On a serious matter, does the Deputy First Minister share my concern that the number of schoolchildren being recorded as drug abusers has more than trebled since the Labour-Liberal Executive came to power in 1999?

Nicol Stephen: I share concern about any rising trend in drug abusers. It is important to emphasise, though, that the Executive has made significant progress in that area. Significant additional funding has been made available for drug treatment in Scotland. The amount invested in 2000-01 was £12.3 million; in 2005-06, it had risen to £23.7 million. Drugs in our schools and our prisons is a vital issue for the future of Scotland.

I am the father of four young children. Parents often say to me, "You're lucky—your children are still at primary school. We have teenage children and we have to face up to this problem now." My concern is that by the time my children are in secondary school, the problem should have got better rather than worse. That is a big challenge for Scotland and for everyone here, because of global trends. We see the scale of the issue throughout Scotland, the United Kingdom, Europe and the world. There are rising problems—for example, the recent statistics on cocaine use—but there are also some encouraging trends. Through the concerted efforts of education authorities, drug treatment facilities and health boards in Scotland, we are making progress, but we can never be complacent on this issue and we have more work to do.

Nicola Sturgeon: Indeed. I draw the Deputy First Minister's attention to figures that have just been published. Is he aware that, in 1999, 53 schoolchildren under the age of 15 were reported to the Scottish drug misuse database and that there have been 188 such reports this year? Since 1999, 1,000 schoolchildren under the age of 15 have been recorded as drug abusers. Does the Deputy First Minister agree that those figures are not progress, that they are deeply shocking and that they should sound a loud alarm bell about the effectiveness of current policies to tackle drug misuse among children and young people?

Nicol Stephen: I agree that those figures are shocking. Firm action is required to tackle the issue. Drug-misusing parents must take their responsibilities seriously so that their children do not follow. There should be cross-party consensus that action must be taken on the issue. This should not be a party-political issue that divides the parties. Some tough decisions require to be taken. The Executive is facing up to the issues and is currently debating the balance between the rights of parents and the rights of the young person who might be affected. As in all other areas of policy, the rights and best interests of the child should be at the centre of our decision making.

If there are young people who are abusing drugs in Scotland, we need to find out about them and to be able to take firm action. I finish where I started: the increases are a worrying trend, but one is too many and we need to work together to take action to tackle the problem, which afflicts too many parts of society and too many communities in Scotland.

Nicola Sturgeon: I hope that we can find some consensus today. Does the Deputy First Minister share my concern that the Executive is not taking firm action? I remind him of an exchange between the First Minister and me in early February this year. Does he recall that I expressed deep concern about the withdrawal of all dedicated funding for drugs education in our schools? The First Minister said that he was about to receive a report on the effectiveness of drugs education that, to quote its remit,

"will be of value to ... policymakers and schools".

That report has been submitted to ministers but, nearly a year later, it has still not been published. In light of the shocking figures that show that young people are abusing drugs, will the Deputy First Minister agree to publish that report today?

Nicol Stephen: I believe that that report should be published in due course. It is currently with the Minister for Education and Young People.

It is important that we do what the Scottish National Party called for in June, when it demanded a summit on the issue and called for

co-operation, not confrontation, on it. Last week, we had a statement from the SNP that it is time for a Scottish drugs commission to reach a consensus on long-term action. I can support that policy and both of those calls, but the problem requires concerted effort on a variety of fronts. It requires more to be done on drugs education, on enforcement, on support for rehabilitation and treatment and on drugs seizures. For example, we have had record drugs seizures, worth more than £20 million, this year.

There are some positive trends, but there are also some worrying issues. Nicola Sturgeon has rightly identified the rising figures of young people in our schools who are abusing drugs. That is of concern—it worries all members—and it is important that we take concerted action on it together over the coming months.

Nicola Sturgeon: I hope that the Deputy First Minister agrees that, to enable us to start making informed decisions, a report that has been with ministers for almost a year must be published with no further delay. Does the Deputy First Minister agree that the problem is not only in drugs education but in access to drugs rehabilitation? In 2004, the First Minister promised

"a comprehensive improvement of drug rehabilitation services"

but, today, people are waiting longer for help. For example, is the Deputy First Minister aware that, in 2004, 23 per cent of people had to wait more than 14 days for access to community rehabilitation but, today, 54 per cent of people wait more than 14 days? Does the Deputy First Minister accept that that is another failure to deliver on the part of the Labour-Liberal Democrat Executive? Will he explain the reasons for it? Communities throughout Scotland are paying the price right now.

Nicol Stephen: I have already emphasised that there should be increasing consensus between the parties on the matter. The parties have worked together on this really important issue in the past. The SNP called for that consensus and I underscored the drive for it. Clearly, improvement—in some cases, significant improvement—is required in some areas but the situation is patchy and the trend is positive in others.

It is typical of Nicola Sturgeon to emphasise the negative rather than the positive. For example, she could have referred to the school building projects that have been completed since I last took First Minister's question time—20 in primary schools and seven in secondary schools. She could also have referred to the rising trend in teacher numbers—additional teachers can help in this issue—the rising trend in attainment or new

figures that show that crime levels are dropping. There is a series of positive trends in health, education, jobs and the economy.

Drug abuse is important, but it is not an issue on which Nicola Sturgeon should seek to divide the parties. Rather, she should draw us together, particularly at this time of year.

Cabinet (Meetings)

2. Miss Annabel Goldie (West of Scotland) (Con): I extend our best wishes to the First Minister and hope that a speedy recovery awaits him.

To ask the First Minister what issues will be discussed at the next meeting of the Scottish Executive's Cabinet. (S2F-2630)

The Deputy First Minister and Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Nicol Stephen): As always, the next meeting of the Cabinet will discuss issues of importance to Scotland.

Miss Goldie: During last week's First Minister's question time, the First Minister derided the concept of a local income tax. He was right to do so, on the basis that a local income tax would be a disaster for hard-working families in Scotland, costing them hundreds of pounds extra a year. Can the Deputy First Minister confirm that the First Minister was speaking on behalf of the entire Scottish Executive in making those statements and that the First Minister enjoys the full support of his deputy in that regard?

Nicol Stephen: We should first remember that council tax went up by 40 per cent in the final five years of the last Conservative Government and that, under the current Executive, the increases have been half those that took place under the Conservatives. We should remember the First Minister's remarks on that as well.

On local income tax—if I may emphasise this with the forbearance of my Labour colleagues—the last thing the Liberal Democrats want is the centralised capping with questionable legal powers that the SNP is talking about. It would take hundreds of millions of pounds away from local councils—and education, children's services, social work and, indeed, action to tackle the problem of drugs. We take a different view from the SNP. Our policy is clear and on the record.

Miss Goldie: What a revealing answer. If I did not know any better, I would say that there might be an element of unseasonal discord between the Deputy First Minister and his boss, but let me ask him another question.

Last week, the Deputy First Minister's colleague, the Minister for Justice, briefed the Sunday press that the Executive is considering a welcome and

overdue change on drug policy. We are told that the Executive is considering moving away from its exclusive dependence on methadone towards abstinence-based options. Will the Deputy First Minister today state his unease about overreliance on methadone and confirm his total support for the Minister for Justice's proposals?

Nicol Stephen: I completely agree that there should not be overreliance on methadone or a single approach to drugs policy in Scotland, but there never has been. I have already quoted the figures. We are investing significantly more—almost double—in drug rehabilitation and treatment facilities. The number of drug treatment and rehabilitation beds in Scotland has gone up significantly.

More needs to be done. It is interesting to see the shift in the debate in recent weeks. I support that shift and strongly agree with the action that the Minister for Justice, Cathy Jamieson, has taken. There is no discord or disagreement between the First Minister and me on these issues; I fully support the improvements and the extra investment needed to tackle them.

Miss Goldie: I am pleased to witness an uncharacteristic departure from taciturnity on the part of the Deputy First Minister, and I welcome his words in so far as they say anything.

However, I am seized with unease. Does the Deputy First Minister accept that he is jointly and severally responsible for seven and a half years of rampant drugs-related crime, escalating methadone prescriptions, soaring cocaine use, a completely discredited know the score initiative, and a political vacuum on drugs strategy? Is he proud of his role in all that?

Nicol Stephen: There have been some increases, but there have been some improvements as well. It is important to say that, in tackling the problem, the Executive is not in any sense complacent. The funding of rehabilitation and detoxification services has increased dramatically.

I do not think that we should take lessons on the issue from the Conservatives. Let us remember that the base from which we started was created by the Conservatives. After they had been in office a long, long time, the lack of rehabilitation and treatment services in Scotland was appalling. We are tackling that and taking action on it.

The Conservatives say that they are the champions of drug abusers and drug users in Scotland, but that is laughable. We are taking a broad range of action on the issues, which involves education, enforcement and new treatment and rehabilitation facilities. I agree that such action is overdue, but significant progress is being made. It is clear that all the parties and all

members want to give the issue the highest priority, which it deserves. I hope that, rather than making cheap party-political points, we can work on the issue together.

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): I will take two supplementaries.

Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind): In the light of the letter from the Deputy Minister for Finance, Public Service Reform and Parliamentary Business to the Local Government and Transport Committee in which he withdraws support for fairer and more regular management of prostitution on the streets, what plans does the Executive have to ensure that public opinion, which is almost uniformly in favour of the management of street prostitution, is reflected in any new legislation?

Nicol Stephen: It is important to emphasise that the main focus of the Prostitution (Public Places) (Scotland) Bill is to tackle kerb crawling. The Executive believes that doing so is vital. As for how the bill progresses, it is important that we work with members of the Local Government and Transport Committee, examine the issues that are raised at stage 2, consider carefully any amendments to the bill and move forward as effectively and appropriately as possible. The issue is significant for Scotland and is of UK-wide importance. We want to take the correct steps to create the right legal framework in the coming weeks.

Richard Lochhead (Moray) (SNP): The Deputy First Minister will be aware that fishing communities consider the new days-at-sea restrictions that were imposed at the fishing negotiations this morning to be a major blow. Is he aware that, in response to the outcome of the negotiations, Michael Park, the head of the Scottish White Fish Producers Association, said on the radio this morning:

"This is the most blatant display of a north south divide that I have seen for many, many years ... Not our Minister, but the English Minister Ben Bradshaw chose not to defend us"?

Will the Deputy First Minister explain to the chamber and our fishing communities why Ross Finnie, Scotland's fisheries minister, who is responsible for 70 per cent of the UK fishing industry and 25 per cent of European Union waters, did not have the power to defend our fishing communities at the negotiations?

Nicol Stephen: The issue is important. I emphasise that Ross Finnie secured the best outcome that was possible for Scotland at those difficult talks.

The outcome on quotas is positive and reflects the strength of our Scottish arguments. The quotas for Rockall haddock, monkfish and west-coast nephrops will increase significantly. That

outcome builds on the increases that we secured earlier in the autumn for haddock and mackerel, which are key Scottish stocks.

However, I fully understand the strength of feeling about the further cuts in days at sea. We should remember that the European Commission's initial proposals were for cuts of 25 per cent. We also resisted attempts to force the Scottish white-fish fleet, which has done more than any other fleet to save cod stocks, to take more than its fair share of cuts. Many of our fishermen will be able to recover lost days by signing up to better conservation methods or tighter enforcement.

I repeat that Ross Finnie has achieved in difficult circumstances the best outcome that was possible from those difficult negotiations.

Mr Alasdair Morrison (Western Isles) (Lab): Will the Deputy First Minister agree that securing an increase of 10 per cent in the west-coast prawn quota is to be warmly welcomed? That is over and above the 38 per cent that was secured at last year's summit. Does he agree that when ministers go to argue for an increased quota, the case must be based on sound and robust science and not on the vacuous short-termism that some political parties in the Parliament advocate? That short-termism would lead to the destruction of many fishing communities.

Nicol Stephen: I agree. Significant improvements in quotas have resulted from the talks. However, I do not wish to understate the impact of the days-at-sea changes. I emphasise that the Commission's initial approach could have been very damaging for the whole North sea fishery.

A major focus of the deal is sustainability. In Scotland, we want to achieve a sustainable fishery by working with our fishermen, our fishing fleet and local fishing communities. That is the best way forward. I hope that as a result of the deal we will continue to have strong support from the fishing industry. Richard Lochhead quoted one individual, but I have seen other quotations from the fishing sector that indicate that, on balance, this was a fair deal in what could have been worse circumstances, given the nature of the negotiations.

Secretary of State for Scotland (Meetings)

3. Shiona Baird (North East Scotland) (Green): To ask the First Minister when he will next meet the Secretary of State for Scotland and what issues he intends to discuss. (S2F-2636)

The Deputy First Minister and Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Nicol Stephen): The First Minister has no immediate plans to meet the secretary of state; nor do I.

Shiona Baird: No one would argue that there is no need for a road bridge across the Forth, but will the Deputy First Minister join me in condemning those who are scaremongering that the current bridge is in imminent danger of collapse? Does he recognise that the construction of an additional bridge across the Forth would simply generate more traffic and congestion, and divert very large amounts of money away from improvements to public transport between the Lothians and Fife? Does he agree that the best solution would be to do everything to secure the future viability of the current bridge, rather than bow to the wishes of the roads lobby, which for the past 25 years has been campaigning for an additional bridge?

The Presiding Officer: That was three questions in one, Deputy First Minister.

Nicol Stephen: I do not agree with Shiona Baird. It is important that there should be a replacement crossing of the Forth and that the Executive should make progress on the issue as quickly as possible, taking into consideration the solid technical advice that we are now obtaining. It is also important to emphasise the crucial role that the Executive is playing in reducing the number of lorry miles on Scotland's roads, for example by shifting freight off our roads and on to our railways: 25 million lorry miles have been removed from Scottish roads. With that in mind, it is important that the new crossing should be multimodal, involving public transport as well as motor vehicles. Those are all important considerations for the Executive. We intend to make progress on the issue, not only for the benefit of people in Fife, but for the benefit of the Scottish economy and the whole of Scotland.

Shiona Baird: I thank the Deputy First Minister for that interesting reply. Tavish Scott has argued repeatedly that we must have the full facts about the state of the bridge before we make a decision. The Executive commissioned five studies, the last of which will report in May next year, but we hear that, with only one study completed, the Executive has decided to go ahead with the construction of a second bridge. Why does it not wait for the full facts? If the Deputy First Minister genuinely believes that there is a case for a replacement bridge, rather than an additional bridge that would double capacity across the Forth, to be constructed, will he commit himself to coming up with a timetable for dismantling the existing bridge?

Nicol Stephen: It seems to me that Shiona Baird wants a timetable for dismantling the Fife economy. We must take action on the issue and treat it with urgency. We have received three reports on the matter in the past week. That is why the Cabinet has decided that we must proceed with a replacement crossing. Clearly, a great deal

of additional work requires to be done before we can deliver that. We need to decide its location and nature—whether it will be a bridge or a tunnel; both options are still open—and to work out its costs and funding. We are committed to doing all those things. The decision has been made, and we now want to make progress.

Education (Play Techniques)

4. Mr Kenneth Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab):

To ask the First Minister how play techniques will complement traditional teaching methods for primary school children. (S2F-2633)

The Deputy First Minister and Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Nicol Stephen): Play is vital to more effective learning and teaching for primary school children. There is clear evidence that it helps to smooth the transition from nursery to primary school and to ease children into more formal school learning. Parents, teachers and education experts support the Executive's plans to increase the importance of play in our schools.

Mr Macintosh: I thank the Deputy First Minister for his answer, as well as Hugh Henry, the Minister for Education and Young People, for his announcement earlier this week. Is the Deputy First Minister aware that learning through play is already practised with great success in many of our schools, particularly in my constituency, in East Renfrewshire, and, as the Deputy First Minister mentioned, offers particular advantages for children who are making the transition from nursery to primary school?

Is the Deputy First Minister aware that, through play, children learn to concentrate, to be resilient and to be self-confident—and, who knows, they might even have fun—but that in many communities, in particular deprived communities, some children are denied the opportunity for safe and challenging play areas? Will the Deputy First Minister look to build on this week's announcements and the lessons being learned in our schools to develop a national play strategy so that the advantages of play can be made available to all our children, not just the youngest?

Nicol Stephen: I firmly agree with everything Kenneth Macintosh said. It is important that we consider his suggestion about a national play strategy. I know that Hugh Henry, the Minister for Education and Young People, will want to explore that suggestion further.

The Executive intends to issue, under the curriculum for excellence, statements of good practice in play, followed by revised guidance to education authorities, but it is not all about guidance and good practice—it is also about the adequacy of play facilities, green spaces and

opportunities for play in and around our schools. I would like our approach to play to be more like that in Scandinavia, where play is an integral part of the education system. I agree entirely with Kenneth Macintosh that play can complement traditional learning techniques and bring real benefits to every child in Scotland.

Additional Vehicle Crossing (Firth of Forth)

5. Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP): To ask the First Minister whether the Scottish Executive now believes that an additional crossing of the Forth for motor vehicles should be constructed. (S2F-2638)

The Deputy First Minister and Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Nicol Stephen): We have received initial reports and it is clear that a replacement crossing across the Forth river is necessary to maintain that critical economic link. The new crossing, whether a bridge or a tunnel, should give importance to public transport as well as to motor vehicles.

Fergus Ewing: Is it not disappointing, therefore, that the Executive has not even now made a decision to include a Forth crossing on the strategic transport projects list?

In the spirit of festive good will and inter-party co-operation, I offer two Christmas gifts to the Deputy First Minister. The first is the SNP policy to commit now to a new Forth crossing for Scotland. The second is the SNP policy to abandon the grossly expensive, complex and risky trams and Edinburgh airport rail link schemes. Would the Deputy First Minister not be more comfortable in his role as junior in my party, which is prepared to make the tough and right choices for Scotland?

Nicol Stephen: I do not know how explicit I have to be. The Executive is committed to building a replacement crossing, and the tunnel option remains open. We have had clear confirmation, from various technical assessments, of the need for a new crossing.

Unlike the SNP, we will not cancel other much-needed transport projects to fund the new crossing. We will take a consistent view on the matter—we will not flip-flop like the SNP. Fergus Ewing spoke about cancelling the Edinburgh airport rail link scheme—a much-needed, vital Scottish project that the SNP used to support. Fergus Ewing spoke about cancelling the trams project, which the SNP used to support—another flip-flop. There is no consistency from the SNP on such policies.

We have an ambitious major capital spending programme for transport in Scotland, including public transport. It is vital that we make a full investment not only in that important economic link

to Fife, but in the major public transport projects to which the Executive is committed.

Dentists (Access)

6. Euan Robson (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD): To ask the First Minister how the Scottish Executive intends to improve access to high-quality dentistry across Scotland. (S2F-2635)

The Deputy First Minister and Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Nicol Stephen): We will improve access to national health service dentistry through continued investment such as the £30 million allocated for dental projects under the primary care and community care premises modernisation programme, including the recent opening of the new dental practice, outreach and training centre in Aberdeen.

Euan Robson: Does the Deputy First Minister agree that a reduction in waiting lists for dental services will be achieved by a mixed economy of NHS salaried and general dental practitioners and that more work is required to persuade general dental practitioners to continue or resume taking NHS fee-paying patients? Does he welcome proposals for up to 12 new NHS salaried dentists in two new surgeries in Coldstream and Hawick in my constituency?

Nicol Stephen: Yes, I agree. We want everyone in Scotland, wherever they live, to have access to an NHS dentist. We support independent general dental practitioners who provide general dental services. However, there are gaps in the provision of service. The salaried general dental service also has a vital role to play in the provision of NHS dentists. We have introduced a number of incentives to encourage dentists to treat all categories of patient and we will continue to monitor the effectiveness of those arrangements and take further action if it is required.

Knife Violence

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh):

The next item of business is a members' business debate on motion S2M-5117, in the name of Andrew Welsh, on respect your life, not a knife. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament notes that 27 November 2006 is the sixth anniversary of the tragic death of 10-year-old Damilola Taylor, a young immigrant from Nigeria who moved to the United Kingdom with his sister and his mother, while his father stayed behind, in order to make better lives for themselves, and who three months later was murdered in London, England, on his way home from his local library; conveys its deepest sympathies to his surviving family and congratulates them on ensuring that this young man's legacy lives on in the Damilola Taylor Trust, a not-for-profit organisation that has launched a campaign to reduce knife violence by getting secondary schools to encourage students to sign a pledge wall stating that they will not carry weapons; agrees that the goals of the campaign, namely to commit young people not to carry weapons and to demonstrate to those who do that the majority of young people do not want to carry weapons, are both laudable and practical; congratulates local organisations in Scotland, such as the Community Alcohol Free Environment (CAFE Project) initiative in Angus and other local organisations that are trying to bring the campaign to Scotland, and considers that the Scottish Executive should offer its full assistance and support to encouraging the spread of this community-led initiative to schools throughout Scotland to spread the "Respect your Life, Not a Knife" message.

12:32

Mr Andrew Welsh (Angus) (SNP): The purpose of my all-party motion on respect your life, not a knife is to highlight the co-operation between the Damilola Taylor Trust and the Angus community alcohol-free environment project in raising awareness of knife crime and encouraging active participation in schools and youth organisations. As Westminster member of Parliament for Angus, I remember meeting Damilola Taylor's parents in the House of Commons and their determination to ensure that good would come of this tragedy.

In memory of Damilola, we are asking every young person to sign a pledge promising not to carry a weapon. In a letter to headmasters, Richard Taylor said:

"My son died needlessly and painfully on a Peckham stairwell ... I could not save my son, but my aim, with your support, is to save other young people's lives by asking them to join our pledge campaign.

I am asking all secondary schools to encourage their pupils to sign up to pledge walls stating that, in memory of Damilola, they will not carry a weapon (especially a knife).

A pledge wall achieves two aims:

Committing young people to their promise.

Showing the minority that the majority of young people will not carry weapons, especially knives, therefore it is safer to be in the majority."

In encouraging ownership by young people of their lives and actions, the Arbroath-based CAFE project is working closely with this Home Office-sponsored England and Wales campaign and bringing it to Scotland. Last month, the CAFE project team leaders and young people attended a special event in London to commemorate Damilola's life, which included presentations by convicted armed robbers and drug dealers warning young people against carrying knives as well as a four-hour exhibition session showcasing the CAFE project's own street games and special fair play rules.

I commend to members the pioneering work that is being done by the Angus CAFE project in partnership with integrated community schools, those working on the safe Angus for everyone initiative, Angus College and other local organisations. The street games pitch has been out five to six times a week, and every Angus town is covered—indeed, villages in Angus are now being reached. In the past five months, 1,249 boys and 233 girls, ranging from five-year-olds to 18-year-olds, have participated; local volunteers and community groups have also been involved. The CAFE project is a well-matched partner for the Damilola Taylor Trust work in encouraging young people to own their lives and actions.

The CAFE project seeks approval from Scottish local authorities to distribute anti-knife posters and brochures and a letter from Richard Taylor that encourages head teachers to make those materials available to all primary 6 and primary 7 classes and every secondary school. Under the supervision of school staff, young persons can add their signatures to classroom or school pledge walls, as well as their comments on why they are opposed to knife crimes. The posters and leaflets also support young people by telling them how to react to bullying, how to get out of being a member of a violent gang and how to contact the police confidentially for help. Two Scottish local authorities have already signed up to the campaign. I hope that the minister and all members of the Scottish Parliament will encourage their councils to play their part in making Scotland a safer place for our young people.

The initiative does not seek in any way to rival or replace other efforts; rather, it adds another positive dimension to those efforts. The campaign aims to encourage parliamentary and local initiatives. That aim dovetails perfectly with the Government's stated objective of tackling knife violence throughout Scotland. Recently, in announcing the knives: let's not scar another generation initiative, the Minister for Justice stated:

"We need to challenge the idea that knife carrying is acceptable or a normal."

That is the purpose of the respect life, not a knife campaign.

Violence and knife crimes are not a new phenomenon, nor are they a problem only in Scotland. Such problems exist throughout the world. Therefore, we can learn from best practice wherever we find it and—I hope—provide pioneering, positive projects that can inspire others.

Knife violence cannot be divorced from other problems that our society faces. We all know that there is a correlation between crime and poverty and a lack of opportunities. The battle to stop knife crime is part of the wider necessity to improve the lifestyles and life prospects of everyone in our society. We must succeed in that battle; the dangers of not doing so can be seen in cities such as Manchester, where there has already been an escalation from knives to guns. Urgent action is required in Scotland to ensure that that escalation never happens here. We must all share that task.

We must be open to ideas that can inform action in Scotland. The existence of the Scottish Parliament allows us to seek out developments from other jurisdictions, determine their worth and adapt them to Scottish needs. In that context, I congratulate the Angus CAFE project, which is run by, for and with Scotland's young people, on doing just that, with its street football, good conduct and alcohol and drug-free environment. The project is a perfect example of adapting best practice and a model that others can follow. It is still more than willing to learn from and adopt practices from other organisations.

I hope that the minister and all my parliamentary colleagues will help. We can make a real difference to young lives by implementing Government and local initiatives and through organisations working with Scotland's young people to give them hope for the future. We can offer them alternatives and positive lifestyles—that is what this debate is about. By working together, we can ensure that good comes out of the evil that was done to young Damilola Taylor.

12:40

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): Many of us can now take great heart from the circumstances surrounding the life and, ultimately and sadly, the death of Damilola Taylor. It is a great pity that a life had to be lost before so many ideas could be reconsidered and refocused. The Damilola Taylor Trust is doing a great deal of good in London and many other cities across England and Wales. It is important for the Parliament to welcome the fact that the CAFE project in

Arbroath has taken the opportunity to align itself with the trust, take up its work and attempt to spread it throughout Scotland.

The CAFE project has been the subject of debates that Andrew Welsh has brought to the chamber in the past. It is important that I take the opportunity to praise the work that the project continues to do in a number of areas. In particular, I praise the devoted efforts of Norrie Stein, the chairman of the project, who continues to do unrivalled work in encouraging its development.

By taking up the respect your life, not a knife campaign, the CAFE project is serving the important function of making a campaign that was originally targeted at England and Wales a United Kingdom-wide campaign. As I have said in previous debates on the subject, every one of us has to accept responsibility for dealing with the issue. It is the responsibility of every individual to do what they can; whether we are parents, youth workers or people who work on a daily basis with young people in a school or project setting, we must always have at the front of our mind the need to deal with the potential issue of knife crime and the ways in which young people may, mistakenly, become involved in it.

As we all know, many young people in Scotland carry a knife for the wrong reason. Although we know—both statistically and anecdotally—that a young person is more likely to become a victim of knife crime if they carry a knife, for whatever reason, than if they do not carry one, many of them believe that carrying a knife gives them some kind of protection.

I commend the work of the CAFE project and the Damilola Taylor Trust. I hope that the debate will add to the campaign that must build across Scotland—among its politicians, parents and people alike—to fight the scourge of knife crime and ensure that such crime becomes a shrinking problem in Scotland's society.

12:43

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): I commend Andrew Welsh on bringing the debate to the chamber. Today marks the last debating day of 2006. Indeed, this time of the year is a relevant time at which to debate knife crime and crimes of violence. Tomorrow, I will visit the Borders general hospital to meet the staff of the accident and emergency department. Regrettably, when it comes to knife crime and crimes of violence, this time of year is one of their busiest.

There is no doubt that there is support across the chamber for the aims of the respect your life, not a knife campaign. Just a glance at the

Damilola Taylor Trust website is enough to highlight the scale of the problem. The trust says:

"A knife crime is committed EVERY 25 MINUTES with four in five offenders aged between 12 and 20 and a third of victims aged between 10 and 17."

It goes on to say:

"A MORI survey for the Youth Justice Board found that 29% of secondary school children and 57% of excluded young people admitted that they had carried knives."

It asks why young people carry knives—that is a question that is also asked by Strathclyde police's violence reduction unit; I welcome the Scottish Executive's decision to make the unit a national body. In their responses, young people said that they carry knives as a way of acquiring status or respect; for self-protection; as a result of peer pressure; because knives are a fashion accessory; or in order to steal, harass or intimidate. The responses show the fundamental misconception among young people that knife wounds are not fatal; that it is not extremely dangerous to carry a knife; or that carrying a knife is in some way socially acceptable.

In Scotland, the picture is similar. For example, knife crime levels in pockets of Strathclyde are extremely alarming. Although it is fair to say that levels of violent crime and knife crime are stagnating and it is welcome that recent statistics for this year reveal that levels are lower than they were, on average, over the past five years, statistics that were released in March this year show that youngsters as young as eight years old have been caught with an offensive weapon by Scottish police. In the past year, more than 1,000 youngsters under the age of 15 have been reported to the children's panel for carrying knives, 150 of whom were under the age of 12.

Inspector Tom Halbert of the violence reduction unit said:

"it is a sad fact of life that in some areas, young people think it's acceptable to carry a knife or other offensive weapon."

The reasons that he gave for why they do so are similar to those provided by the research that was done for the Damilola Taylor Trust and include the social acceptability of the practice.

The issue is what can be done, both in criminal justice and in education. In that regard, the work that the trust is doing, as well as the work of the violence reduction unit, is extremely important. Neither body can be effective in isolation; both must be effective. The Parliament is working to change the law. We must do more in our schools and neighbourhoods, especially by involving young people directly in policy decisions.

12:46

Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): I congratulate Andrew Welsh on securing the debate. I want to pick up on the general thread of the argument that was made by Andrew Welsh and Jeremy Purvis, which was that the help that the Damilola Taylor Trust is providing is part of the solution.

I begin by quoting from a study by the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies. I admit that it was carried out in England and Wales, but the situation there is not so different from that in Scotland. The study says:

"Since it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to limit the availability of knives and knives are merely a tool used in violent crime, success in fighting knife usage will only come with success in dealing with the underlying causes of violence, fear and insecurity."

That issue has, in part, been addressed by the three members who have already spoken in the debate.

I turn to school bullying. The anti-bullying network has now been absorbed into the work of Scotland's commissioner for children and young people. I urge the Executive to provide extra funding to SCCYP for the explicit purpose of rolling out the anti-bullying strategies throughout Scotland, if that is possible. One of the causes of crime and violence among children is a feeling of insecurity, to which bullying is central. There is a surprising and unacceptable level of bullying in all schools in Scotland and it must be tackled.

Youth clubs throughout Scotland and initiatives such as the CAFE project that Andrew Welsh has mentioned still need more support for the work that they do. In addition, we must acknowledge that there have been enormous successes. For example, 1,600 young people were nominated for YoungEdinburgh awards. Only 2 per cent of young people get involved in crime and violent crime.

The increase in knife crime is probably the least acceptable and most worrying development that we face. We still need to examine the design of housing estates and the general availability of amenities. The worse the design of our buildings and streets and the fewer amenities there are, the greater the likelihood that there will be violence.

I will conclude by picking up on what Jeremy Purvis said about excluded young people being twice as likely to be involved in knife crime or to carry knives. There needs to be early intervention with young people who show obvious signs of being excluded at nursery school and primary school. The help and support that they need should be made available as soon as possible.

12:49

Ms Rosemary Byrne (South of Scotland) (Sol): I thank Andrew Welsh for securing the debate, which I welcome. This is a good time of year to highlight the problem of knife violence, as Jeremy Purvis said. We should also consider the good practice that is going on. The Damilola Taylor Trust is a testament to Damilola Taylor's family and the campaign to reduce knife violence by working with pupils in schools is excellent.

Education is the key. However, we need to ensure that we do not preach to children and young people but instead convey the message about knife crime in a way to which they can relate. The respect your life, not a knife campaign and the pledge wall initiative give children and young people a meaningful role in the education process, which will help to gain their commitment. Such an approach could be incorporated into anti-bullying strategies. I agree with Robin Harper that there needs to be more investment and we need to up the ante on funding for the anti-bullying network.

Local councils have an important role to play. It is interesting that when Scotland's commissioner for children and young people consulted young people about issues that concern them, having things to do was top of the list. I received a letter from the CAFE project in Arbroath, in Andrew Welsh's area, which described the good activities and games in which it involves young people. The CAFE project provides an example of the good practice that we should encourage.

Peer-group pressure is part of the problem of knife carrying. As Jeremy Purvis said, another issue is that some young people think that they must carry a knife for their own protection. However, two lives are often ruined when someone is injured or loses their life, as a result of a person's naivety and lack of understanding of the implications of carrying a knife. I have said again and again that the key to ensuring that our children and young people can withstand peer pressure is to build up their self-confidence, self-esteem and sense of achievement. As I have said in many debates, we need more youth projects like the excellent CAFE project. We need more youth workers and more hands-on work with young people in our communities.

It is time to listen to young people. The children's commissioner is doing an excellent job to ascertain young people's feelings and views and we must take her findings on board. We need to provide much more funding to local authorities, to ensure that there are plenty of things to do—as the young people put it—so that we can engage young people in the education process, involve them in projects and ensure that their self-esteem, confidence and sense of achievement are high.

12:53

The Deputy Minister for Justice (Johann Lamont): I congratulate Andrew Welsh on securing this important debate and on his powerful arguments on the key issues that have been identified in the debate. I thank him and other members for their speeches on a subject that concerns all members and people in communities throughout Scotland, who want peace and security for their families and neighbourhoods.

I join other members in expressing our deepest sympathies to the family of young Damilola Taylor, whose loss was a tragic waste of a young life. Those of us who are parents cannot begin to imagine the pain and grief that his parents feel. We admire them and congratulate them on their efforts to continue their son's legacy through the work of the Damilola Taylor Trust and the recently launched respect your life, not a knife campaign. This is not the first time that I have been struck by how families who suffer tragedies find the strength not only to determine the truth about and causes of the tragedy but to ensure that what happened to them will not happen to others—that is a phrase that families often use and one that I know that Damilola's family has used. I am in awe of the courage of Damilola's parents and of families throughout Scotland who, when touched by tragedy, decide that their experience will shape and improve the lives of everyone in Scotland.

We all know that knife crime has no place in our society. It is imperative that we all work together to tackle this blight on some of our communities. The Minister for Justice and I welcome members' continued support for the efforts that are being made to reduce knife crime in Scotland. We are under no illusions—real change will take time—but we have made significant progress in the past year and we will continue to take direct and effective action to tackle the problem head on. Serious violent crime is now at its lowest level since devolution. Recently published homicide figures for Scotland showed a substantial reduction in the number of people killed with a sharp instrument. We must not become complacent, although we have taken important steps in the continuing fight against knife crime and violence.

Members have identified issues that require action. A combination of approaches is required. It is essential to understand, as we do in talking about bullying that, although we have to deal with the causes and what motivates people to take such actions, we must also ensure that the young people who are victims have the confidence to come forward. Therefore, enforcement is important, although we also need to think about education and diversion activities. From talking to the children's commissioner, we know that young

people identified having things to do as important, but they also identified safe streets as important. We cannot have good places for young people to go to in our communities if behaviour that involves facilities being trashed is not addressed.

Young people need their self-esteem bolstered, but one difficulty in some communities is that carrying a knife bolsters young people's self-esteem. We must challenge them to acknowledge that that is not an appropriate way in which to feel good about themselves. I was a schoolteacher in a previous life and I remember telling young boys that they faced the prospect of losing their lives over a territorial battle in an area that nobody further of their very small part of Glasgow even knew anything about. I challenged them on the importance of such battles to them.

Together with the national violence reduction unit, we have made tackling knife crime a priority. Through the unit's safer Scotland anti-violence campaign, more than 12,500 weapons were surrendered during the first national knife amnesty. That was followed by two enforcement campaigns in July and November, which removed a further 1,500 weapons from our streets. Through the Police, Public Order and Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act 2006, we have taken steps to strengthen the law: we have doubled the maximum sentence for anyone who is caught carrying a knife, removed restrictions on police powers of arrest when someone is suspected of carrying a weapon and increased to 18 the minimum age for buying non-domestic knives.

As members will know, further steps will be taken through the Custodial Sentences and Weapons (Scotland) Bill, which is going through the Parliament. The bill will introduce tough new restrictions on the sale of non-domestic knives, so that they can be sold only through licensed dealers, which should help to weed out unscrupulous traders and help legitimate traders to take steps to avoid dangerous weapons falling into the wrong hands. Again, those measures will be backed up with strong enforcement. Trading standards officers will have new powers to search premises and seize items. The bill will also introduce a ban on the general sale of swords, with exceptions for legitimate religious, cultural and sporting purposes.

Those enforcement efforts are extremely important and, I hope, reassure communities that we are serious about tackling the so-called blade culture. However, to achieve change in the long term, we need to challenge attitudes and behaviours. Reducing knife crime should not be seen as the sole responsibility of the Executive and the police, although we will continue to do all that we can. The respect your life, not a knife campaign acknowledges that we need to talk to

family, friends and communities about what people expect of themselves, which is an important and powerful message from the Damilola Taylor Trust. In that context, the Minister for Justice last month launched our new hard-hitting anti-violence campaign, which has been mentioned and which focuses on knife carrying. I hope that members have seen or heard the campaign, which carries the powerful slogan, "Knives: let's not scar another generation". The campaign alone will not solve the problem, but we hope that its message will be understood and that, working together, we can make violence in Scotland the stuff of history lessons, not an everyday reality.

We acknowledge that if we are to achieve change in the next generation, it is important to engage with young people. The respect your life, not a knife campaign seems to have done that successfully, so we need to take encouragement and lessons from it. We have taken steps to engage with young people through the education phase of the safer Scotland campaign, which seeks, through a range of school-led activities, to highlight to schoolchildren the dangers of carrying a weapon. We intend to build on that in the new year and take further steps to engage directly with young people in schools and communities.

I congratulate the CAFE project in Angus. As has been said, it has been doing important work. I am pleased that the youth cafes have become a positive alternative in many areas by offering not only a safe environment but a range of activities for young people to enjoy. They also provide accessible advice and information about lifestyle issues such as sexual health, drugs and alcohol and ensure that there is a focus on giving young people a greater sense of freedom and responsibility while keeping them safe within a secure environment. That is good news not only for young people but for the wider community. There are now youth cafes in all alcohol and drug action team areas across Scotland and we are committed to continuing our support of those facilities and other alcohol-free environments for young people. I know that the Minister for Justice has been invited to visit the CAFE project in Arbroath and I understand that she hopes to visit it at some point in the near future.

We are working hard with our partners to break the link between alcohol and violence. Earlier this year, the violence reduction unit conducted a month-long enforcement campaign to tackle underage and street drinking, which resulted in more than 5,000 litres of alcohol being seized. Licensed premises were also targeted, with more than two thirds of all licensed premises in Scotland being visited and their staff being questioned on current legislation.

All the steps that I have mentioned form part of the package of measures that we are taking forward to help to provide a viable way of reducing knife crime. The package includes short and longer-term measures and initiatives, recognising that such a deep-seated problem cannot be solved overnight. We will continue to work closely with the violence reduction unit and support a range of innovative and sustainable diversionary projects that provide education, training and meaningful opportunities to young people. I have asked my officials to consider what can be learned from the respect your life, not a knife campaign and to continue examining ways of engaging with our young people.

Although inner London inevitably has its own complex set of community problems and cultural issues, Scotland has much to learn from aspects of good initiatives south of the border. I am mindful of Andrew Welsh's comments about the importance of learning from good practice. It is in all of our interests to work together on these matters.

All forms of violence are, ultimately, preventable, not inevitable. In that common realisation, we have a shared outlook with the rest of the United Kingdom. It is important that we continue to drive forward the anti-violence strategy with energy and help to instil a proactive rather than a reactive approach towards cultural attitudes to violence.

I welcome this debate and recognise the longstanding commitment of people throughout Scotland to addressing the issues that we have discussed. I look forward to working with members on these important matters.

13:02

Meeting suspended until 14:15.

14:15

On resuming—

Question Time

SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

Education and Young People, Tourism, Culture and Sport

sportscotland

1. Marilyn Livingstone (Kirkcaldy) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what steps sportscotland is taking to encourage the uptake of sport in areas of multiple deprivation. (S2O-11557)

The Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport (Patricia Ferguson): Sportscotland is investing £1 million annually through its community regeneration programme in projects in areas of multiple deprivation. Those projects aim to assist communities to develop through sports and physical recreation, and aim to promote capacity building by helping groups to establish and sustain projects by developing voluntary and other community organisations.

Marilyn Livingstone: As the minister is aware, the recent multiple deprivation index confirms the key areas in my constituency that fall within the top 15 per cent of deprived areas. Like the minister, I strongly believe that sport is crucial to regeneration and to the health and well-being of my constituents. Is the minister willing to meet me and key stakeholders to discuss the provision of sports facilities and developments in my constituency?

Patricia Ferguson: I would be delighted to meet the member to discuss issues in which we share an interest. A number of projects in Fife are being supported through the initiative that I mentioned. The projects target people in areas such as Lochgelly, Levenmouth, Dysart and Kirkcaldy. I would be more than happy to meet Ms Livingstone to discuss those matters in more detail.

Education Reform

2. Derek Brownlee (South of Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive what lessons it has learned about education reform from other countries. (S2O-11505)

The Minister for Education and Young People (Hugh Henry): We have learned that Scottish education is a success story. We are in the top third of the countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, and we have shown steady improvements in literacy and numeracy. According to PISA—the OECD's programme for international student assessment—

our 15-year-olds are among the best performing in the world. Scotland is in the main stream of educational thinking and policy in the European Union and worldwide, and we are recognised as leading the way in several areas such as curriculum reform, assessment, self-evaluation, enterprise education and school meals policy.

Furthermore, following a commitment in the ambitious, excellent schools programme to benchmark education in Scotland against international standards as a basis for bringing about further improvements in performance, we have taken forward a suite of benchmarking activities, including initiating a series of ministerial conversations with some EU member states and a country review by the OECD, to showcase Scottish education on the world stage and to share and learn from world-class experience.

Derek Brownlee: I am sure that most of us would agree that it is important to share best practice in education, wherever that best practice may come from.

With regard to the bottom-performing 20 per cent of pupils, how many other countries are looking to Scotland to copy what we are doing?

Hugh Henry: Interestingly, over the past week or so I have spoken to ministers from New Zealand and Canada. Both those countries report problems similar to ours with that particular group, and both report similar difficulties in trying to make progress. There are things that we can do to make headway, and others will look to learn from our experience. If we can improve by learning from the experience of others, I see no problem in doing so.

Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP): Is the minister aware that Finland tops the league tables that we are talking about? The Education Committee and the minister's predecessor visited Finland last year. Is the minister aware that a key aspect of Finnish education is the emphasis on the early years? Finland has high-quality nursery teachers, educated to degree level, working with children from a very early age.

The minister announced recently the introduction of structured play into primary 1 classes, but will he assure us that he will not swap teachers from nursery schools in order to implement that policy in primary schools? We cannot have nursery pupils losing out on their education because of the introduction of structured play in primary 1 classes.

Hugh Henry: There is no chance of that happening. Purposeful and structured play is important, and we can learn from countries such as Finland how play can help to develop a child's education and learning experience at a later stage.

Good teachers are important in our schools. An educational underpinning of the curriculum in the early years is essential and teachers can contribute to that. Our nursery nurses and other staff also make a phenomenal contribution in our early years sector. They are part of a team effort to develop and deliver excellent standards of service.

We will look to ensure that resources are available, but we also need to ensure that training is available. The curriculum for excellence allows us to put a structure around that to enable teachers to identify the best way of imparting knowledge and learning experience to children. Everyone recognises that that more flexible approach in the early years will provide definite results later in a child's development.

Marine Wildlife Tourism (Mull)

3. Eleanor Scott (Highlands and Islands) (Green): To ask the Scottish Executive how many jobs and what income marine wildlife tourism brings to the island of Mull. (S2O-11578)

The Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport (Patricia Ferguson): That level of detail on tourism employment and income is not held centrally. However, we know that tourism accounts for 10 per cent of all employment in the VisitScotland network area that includes Mull.

Eleanor Scott: The minister is aware that wildlife tourism is important to Mull, which is part of a candidate area for a possible coastal and marine national park, although it is true that local people have yet to be convinced of the benefits of that, since they have not been made clear. Given that, what discussions have taken place between the minister's department and Ross Finnie's Environment and Rural Affairs Department about the potential benefits of coastal and marine national parks, potential downsides and the need for infrastructure improvements in areas that might be considered to cope with any increase in visitors, such as road and harbour improvements?

Patricia Ferguson: My officials meet Mr Finnie's officials regularly, and Mr Finnie and I meet regularly to discuss such issues and issues that are of interest more generally in our portfolios. One subject that we discuss with increasing seriousness is the sustainability of tourism, which is dear to my heart and to Mr Finnie's.

We want more visitors to come to our country and to spend time in our rural and coastal areas, but it is important to understand that we want visitors to spend more money during their stay if we are to grow our tourism economy and to bring the benefit and effect that we would like to bring to communities up and down the country.

We do not want more visitors all to come at a

particular time. We must be better at encouraging them to visit different areas at different times of the year, so that they do not converge on one area at the same time. We must provide better public transport and more environmentally sustainable accommodation and visitor attractions, so that our visitors do not damage the feature that many of them come for: our environment and landscape.

Having a coastal and marine national park will allow us to support the tourism industry in whichever area of the country the park ends up being located and to maximise the benefits for the community, while ensuring that tourism is sustainable in the environment that it inhabits.

Jim Mather (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I thank the minister for her answer; I was heartened by much of what she said. Will she consider Mull as a complete economic system? Will she work with her ministerial colleagues in enterprise and transport to support Argyll and Bute Council, Argyll and the Islands Enterprise and the community on increasing the number of jobs and the number of people who work on the island of Mull? Will she address the concerns of many in the business community about a disconnect between the terms and conditions that people want and those that are being tabled to them for the Caledonian MacBrayne ferry service between Oban and Craignure?

Patricia Ferguson: As I said in my answer to Ms Scott, I meet my ministerial colleagues regularly to discuss such matters. As a result of the tourism framework for change, co-ordination between VisitScotland and the enterprise networks nationally and locally is now much better. We very much want to encourage that.

We want to ensure that those linkages at a local level involve not just the big agencies, but local agencies and businesses. I have absolutely no problem in concurring with Mr Mather that that needs to happen and, where it comes within my purview to do so, I will certainly ensure that such co-ordination takes place.

Culture (Scotland) Bill

4. Chris Ballance (South of Scotland) (Green): To ask the Scottish Executive how the proposed culture (Scotland) bill will ensure that everybody has the right to participate in the cultural life of the community and enjoy the arts, as required by the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. (S2O-11575)

The Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport (Patricia Ferguson): The provisions of the culture (Scotland) bill take existing international cultural rights as their starting point. I refer the member to my statement to Parliament on 19 January and to the cultural policy document, "Scotland's Culture", which I launched that day.

Chris Ballance: I am well aware of the minister's statement and of "Scotland's Culture" but, with respect, that was not the question that I asked. My question was: what provisions are included in the bill that will ensure that more people have access to the arts and culture?

Patricia Ferguson: The culture bill will give greater practical effect to those rights and entitlements in each local authority area. We want to encourage people to get involved in planning cultural services and to take part in, and enjoy, the opportunities that result. The pathfinder projects that I launched this week—13 projects across the country, which involve 26 local authorities and many more community planning partnerships and other organisations—will provide us with a good opportunity to give local authorities guidance and advice on how initiatives might work in their areas. The point of the measure is to ensure that we have a citizens-based approach to culture. That is exactly what we are doing in the culture bill.

Mr Stewart Maxwell (West of Scotland) (SNP): Regarding the right to participate in the cultural life of the community, I want to ask about the youth music initiative. What should I say to parents who, having been told that their young child would be offered the opportunity to learn a musical instrument in the new year, find that the form that comes home with the child, who desperately wants to learn the piano, gives the child the choice of learning only either the violin or the viola? Does the minister agree that that is no choice at all? What actions is she taking to ensure that the music initiative works to the benefit of enthusiastic and well-motivated children who want to learn certain musical instruments?

Patricia Ferguson: If Mr Maxwell wants to pursue that issue, I will be happy to look into the matter for him if he will write to me. We need to understand that an initiative that is provided through schools will have some restrictions on the number of instruments that might be available to any one child, given the number of children who might opt to play a particular instrument. All those things need to be balanced.

In my experience, learning to play one instrument almost automatically leads one to begin to understand, and to want to play, other musical instruments. Therefore, I would encourage that child to take the opportunity that is available and to move on to another instrument at another time.

Olympic and Commonwealth Games (Facilities)

5. Mr Andrew Arbuckle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive what provision is being made in Scotland for the preparation of facilities for the 2012 London Olympics and possible 2014 Glasgow Commonwealth games. (S2O-11533)

The Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport (Patricia Ferguson): The Executive is investing significant funds through the national and regional facilities strategy to put in place facilities to give elite and up-and-coming athletes top-class facilities in which to train and prepare for future success. Those facilities and others will be available in the run-up to the 2012 London Olympics and a possible Commonwealth games in Glasgow in 2014.

Mr Arbuckle: The London organising committee of the Olympic games is required to provide a pre-games training camp guide that lists approved facilities and locations for sport. The guide will be made available to competing countries. Will Scotland submit a bid for a place in that guide? I understand that that must be done by 31 January.

Patricia Ferguson: On 4 December, sportscotland held a seminar for local authorities and other facility managers to explain the specification requirements for facilities that they might want to qualify for inclusion in the LOCOG brochure. The deadline for submissions is, as Mr Arbuckle said, 31 January and the brochure will be launched at the Beijing Olympics in 2008. It is almost certain that Scotland will be represented in that piece of advertising.

Dr Sylvia Jackson (Stirling) (Lab): I welcome the announcement about the university of sport, and I would like to suggest—I am sure along with you, Presiding Officer—that the University of Stirling with all its expertise in sport is a prime candidate. Will the minister comment on that?

Patricia Ferguson: I am sure that the member does not need me to point out that the re-election in Scotland of a Government of a Labour complexion is required for that proposal to be taken forward, as it is a key plank of our manifesto for sport. There is a list of universities in Scotland that might want to be considered for that accolade, and in the fullness of time we will work with those universities to help them to develop such a proposal and consider which would be best suited to the title.

Community Schools

6. Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): To ask the Lib Dem-Labour Scottish Executive how it is supporting the development of community schools. (S2O-11527)

Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP): What complexion is Jeremy Purvis?

The Minister for Education and Young People (Hugh Henry): I do not know—sometimes I wonder.

The integrated community schools concept is now mainstreamed into the wider integrated

children's services agenda. Some £25.8 million is made available each year to local authorities to provide support for that broader framework at school and neighbourhood level.

Jeremy Purvis: Does the minister appreciate the frustration of some communities when they see schools closed in evenings and at weekends, unlike Beeslack community high school in Penicuik, which is a shining example of a community school? Will the minister support an innovative approach in which communities can establish properly constituted development trusts and, under a service level agreement with the local authority, operate and manage the community use of schools in evenings and at weekends when local authorities are not using them for school purposes?

Hugh Henry: What Jeremy Purvis proposes is certainly interesting, although it could be somewhat complex. However, the model that a local authority wishes to adopt is a matter for local decision making. We have already seen some benefits from local trusts in the provision of leisure facilities.

I hesitate to be more definitive, because I do not want to do anything that would impact on the current relationship between local authorities and schools. However, I know that several local authorities are considering imaginatively how they can access funding and get better use of facilities.

Jeremy Purvis is right to say that it is incredibly frustrating to see community assets closed in the evenings when communities want them. We provide substantial amounts of money to local authorities for education and other services, and it is for each local authority to determine how best to use that money. Local authorities tell us that they prefer funding not to be ring fenced, but often there is pressure when local authorities either cannot afford to use their facilities in the evening or find some bureaucratic impediment to their doing so. I encourage local authorities to work with communities to come up with a solution that is best suited to local needs.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton (Lothians) (Con): Will the minister consider giving head teachers more decision-making powers in the running of community schools so that education takes precedence over other services?

Hugh Henry: Education already takes precedence in our schools, and head teachers have considerable responsibility and flexibility. In a recent announcement, I allocated more capital and revenue money to be paid directly to head teachers for use in their schools, so we have considered the idea sympathetically over the years.

However, we could find ourselves going beyond a situation in which head teachers are responsible

purely for the management of education in schools and into one in which we ask them to become business managers. In some local authority areas, we have seen the development of business managers who are responsible for the management of the physical infrastructure and the non-essential education responsibilities. In all cases, a proper balance needs to be struck.

Vacant Teaching Posts (Secondary Schools)

7. Brian Adam (Aberdeen North) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive how many secondary school teaching posts are vacant. (S2O-11500)

The Minister for Education and Young People (Hugh Henry): The Scottish Executive carries out a teacher vacancy survey each February. The last annual survey showed that 1.5 per cent of posts were vacant and 0.4 per cent were vacant for more than three months.

Brian Adam: I understand that there may be as many as 13 vacant posts at Northfield academy in my constituency and that there may be barriers to filling those vacant posts permanently in order to keep places open for probationers. Can the minister guarantee that the need for probationer posts is not being met disproportionately by schools such as Northfield academy?

Hugh Henry: I am not aware of the specific situation at that school, but everything that I hear about the guaranteed year's employment for probationers indicates that it is a proven success, which has resulted in many more young people coming into the teaching profession and many people returning to teaching or coming to teaching from other activities. Clearly, a project of such scale will always have some implications and in some cases there will be difficulties with how it is managed.

I cannot respond on the particular case now, but the fact is that more teachers are coming in and we are spending more money not only on the school infrastructure but on bringing in teachers. We are on target to meet our commitments for new and additional teachers in the relevant subjects. If there is an issue in one school in Brian Adam's constituency, I urge him to discuss the matter with the local authority.

Finance and Public Services and Communities

West Dunbartonshire (Public Services)

1. Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what action it is taking to improve public services in West Dunbartonshire. (S2O-11542)

The Minister for Finance and Public Service

Reform (Mr Tom McCabe): The Scottish Executive has placed the duty of best value upon local authorities and other public service organisations in West Dunbartonshire. The duty requires that organisations secure continuous improvement in the performance of public services. The duty is audited by Audit Scotland, and the Scottish Executive takes whatever action is necessary to ensure that public services improve in line with the recommendations made in the audit reports.

Jackie Baillie: My colleague John McFall MP and I are grateful for the strong action that the minister has taken to improve the operation of West Dunbartonshire Council. I know that ordinary members of staff, who deliver services daily to my community, share that view. That said, will the minister ensure that the council takes up his offer of external assistance? I believe that such assistance is necessary on two counts: first, to ensure that there is sufficient capacity to take forward a challenging agenda for improvement and, secondly, to restore trust and confidence in the local authority.

Mr McCabe: I thank the member for those comments. Clearly, it is extremely important to restore trust and confidence within the community as the council has had its troubles over the past few months. There has been due process, both through the reports from Audit Scotland and, subsequently, in the public inquiry and the recommendations from the Accounts Commission.

The member is right to say that we have written in strong terms to the council. I have made it clear that I expect it to accept without reservation the Accounts Commission's recommendations. I understand that the council is undergoing a change of political leadership and have been assured this morning that as soon as the new leadership beds in I will receive a quick reply to that letter. I look forward to receiving that response and thereafter to seeing the improvement plan that will be put in place. I look forward to seeing willingness on the part of the council to bring into the authority whoever and whatever is necessary to ensure that the people of the area receive services of the quality and standard that they deserve.

Mr Stewart Maxwell (West of Scotland) (SNP): I am sure that the minister will agree that the best way to improve public services in West Dunbartonshire would be to dump the disastrous Labour administration in May and elect an Scottish National Party administration in its place. Does the minister agree with the findings of the Accounts Commission and does he accept the view of the trade unions that the Labour administration in West Dunbartonshire presided over a culture of bullying and intimidation?

Mr McCabe: I am afraid that the member has missed the point. We are trying to improve the situation in West Dunbartonshire, not make it even worse through the election of an SNP administration.

I said that there has been due process. Audit Scotland spent a considerable time examining the issue and the Accounts Commission held a public inquiry. As I said, I have made it clear to the council that I expect it to accept the recommendations. A number of unacceptable practices were highlighted during the public inquiry. I expect those practices to cease and I expect a culture to be developed that ensures not only that such practices do not recur but that politicians and professional officers are properly focused on serving and improving the quality of life of people in the area.

Public Spending and Revenue

2. Marlyn Glen (North East Scotland) (Lab):

To ask the Scottish Executive what the total gap has been between public expenditure in Scotland and revenues raised since 1999. (S2O-11551)

The Minister for Finance and Public Service Reform (Mr Tom McCabe): According to the "Government Expenditure and Revenue in Scotland" analysis, the cumulative gap between public expenditure in Scotland and public revenues raised in Scotland since 1999 is a massive £49.7 billion.

Marlyn Glen: Does the minister agree that the massive deficit to which he refers and of which he has given details would prohibit the writing off of student debt, make impossible a council tax freeze—even if that were legal—and make a nonsense of any promise that workers in a separate Scotland would pay no extra taxes? Budgeting may seem difficult, but it is obvious that we cannot spend what we do not have. Will the minister assure us that Executive policies are designed to protect hard-working families through service provision, as well as being fair to, for example, small businesses in Scotland?

Mr McCabe: I assure the member that the United Kingdom serves Scotland well, as is self-evident from the figures that I reiterated a moment ago. I concur that the report highlights the fact that affection for nationalism would die instantly if we ever found ourselves in an independent Scotland. The figures make it clear in a very serious way that the progress that this country has made would not only come to a crashing halt but would be thrown into reverse gear. Generations would be denied the opportunity to maximise their potential and this country would be an economic basket case, simply because one political party had decided to put an ideology before the best interests of its citizens. I am confident that if we

continue to discuss those figures and the potential impact of that ideology, people in Scotland will again reject it, allow progress to continue and allow Scotland to flourish as it should.

Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP): Is the minister aware of a parliamentary answer that was given in the House of Commons in 1997 by the then Chief Secretary to the Treasury, which showed that, using the GERS methodology, between 1979 and 1995 Scotland contributed £27 billion more to the UK, at 1997 prices, than we received in return? Given that the Government is now using the same methodology, does not talk of a structural deficit highlight the total failure of this Government's stewardship of our finances and the fact that it has squandered the financial advantage that we had in 1997, or are these claims just a bogus attempt by the Government to talk Scotland down? Does the minister agree with the *Daily Record*, which, following the release in 1997 of the information to which I have referred, commented in an editorial:

"The SNP have done us all a service by scotching the Tory myth that we are subsidy junkies"?

Mr McCabe: Editorials in the *Daily Record* have improved massively since that time; anyone who saw its editorials last week will testify to that. I say to Mr Swinney that we are not in 1979—we are not in the past, but in the present. At this time and over a sustained period Scotland has incurred a fiscal deficit. However, the figures that Mr Swinney cites and the figures for the present time are illustrative of the fact that, when one predicates an economy on the volatility of oil prices, one puts at risk the economic stability of a nation. Historical data, the data from the past five years and even the figures on which Mr Swinney depends for his argument tell us that.

Derek Brownlee (South of Scotland) (Con): I am happy to agree with the Minister for Finance and Public Service Reform about the benefits of being part of the United Kingdom. As one unionist to another, I wonder whether the minister will agree that one reason for the gap that has been identified may be the significant increase in public spending that has taken place since devolution. Is the Executive's failure to get value for money for all that extra spending a result of ministerial incompetence, or is it a cunning plan to undermine the bright sparks on the SNP benches?

Mr McCabe: It is because Mr Brownlee cannot recognise progress when he sees it—that is the main reason.

I am interested in the analogy about increased public expenditure, because that is the very public expenditure that we would have to eliminate in an independent Scotland if we were to have any chance whatever of balancing the books. It is

important and interesting to examine what the consequences of that elimination would be. Our children would not be educated to anything like the standard that would be required to enable them to compete in a competitive and ever-changing world. We would no longer have more than 50 per cent of our young people moving on to further or higher education, and our economy would be in reverse as the rest of the developing world moved further and further ahead. That is the real price that would be paid if we were ever, for one second, to adopt the crazy ideology that the SNP puts forward. It is far too great a price and it is a price that the people of Scotland will reject in due course.

Affordable Housing (Planning Applications)

3. Iain Smith (North East Fife) (LD): I will move the questions away from the election campaign and back to business.

To ask the Scottish Executive what guidance is given to local planning authorities on the inclusion of requirements to provide affordable housing when determining planning applications. (S2O-11526)

The Deputy Minister for Communities (Des McNulty): Scottish planning policy 3, on housing, and planning advice note 74, on affordable housing, provide guidance to planning authorities on the provision of suitable affordable housing through the planning system.

Iain Smith: The minister will be aware that there is a significant shortage of affordable housing in my constituency of North East Fife, and that most of the planning applications are for housing that could not be described as affordable. Can he reconcile that with the recent decision by the reporter from the Scottish Executive, who upheld an appeal by a developer over the contribution that Fife Council was seeking towards the cost of affordable housing in a recent planning application? The reporter determined that the amount that Fife Council was seeking was too high and ruled that no money should be allocated to affordable housing. How is Fife Council to achieve its affordable housing policies within its planning regime if Scottish Executive reporters will not help it?

Des McNulty: PAN 74, on affordable housing, was introduced in March last year. The independent research that was commissioned by the Scottish Executive took the firm view that the quota system for a benchmark of 25 per cent of all housing to be affordable must remain the backbone of the affordable housing land supply in Scotland to ensure the mixed communities that are an important and worthwhile objective of the Executive.

That is clearly what Fife Council is expected to take forward in its structure plan, which has been submitted to the Scottish Executive for consideration. We are listening to the concerns of residents from all parts of Fife, which suggest that the plan should provide for sufficient housing to meet assessed needs, as well as for the wider infrastructure and amenity requirements. A number of those issues need to be addressed before a decision is reached, but I hope that, in the context of considering the structure plan and how affordable housing fits into that, we will have a tight framework for examining the kind of issues that Iain Smith has highlighted.

Lone-parent Families Support

4. Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive what steps it is taking to support lone-parent families across Scotland. (S2O-11535)

The Minister for Communities (Malcolm Chisholm): In addition to the support provided by the UK Government arrangements, the Scottish Executive supports lone parents through a number of organisations and initiatives. Examples include: the lone-parent helpline, where funding of £450,000 has been awarded over three years to provide advice on money, child care, housing, debt and relationships; the parenting across Scotland consortium, which is currently piloting new ways of providing information and support to families; and the working for families programme, which is providing £50 million over four years to help a range of groups, including lone parents, progress towards or into employment by tackling child care and other barriers.

Mike Rumbles: I thank the minister for highlighting all that investment. Does he agree with the assessment of One Parent Families Scotland that more of that expenditure is needed to support lone fathers across the country? If he agrees with that assessment, what steps will he take to build on the successful projects in Edinburgh and Falkirk that engage lone fathers in children's programmes, which they generally feel excluded from or are discouraged from joining?

Malcolm Chisholm: I acknowledge the work that One Parent Families Scotland has done in relation to lone fathers. The programmes that I referred to—and other programmes that I could mention—benefit lone-parent fathers as well as lone-parent mothers.

I could have added to my list sure start Scotland, which helps many families with young children, the Child Poverty Action Group tax credit project and One Parent Families Scotland's sitter service. All those initiatives help lone mothers and lone fathers and build on the significant progress that we have seen from the Westminster Government,

including the increase in help with child care costs that lone parents can get from 70 per cent to 80 per cent this year.

New Homes (Purchaser Protection)

5. Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what progress has been made in taking forward the recommendation of the housing improvement task force to formulate legislation that provides protection for purchasers of new homes. (S2O-11549)

The Deputy Minister for Communities (Des McNulty): I regret the problems that Helen Eadie's constituents have faced through late completion of their homes. The housing improvement task force recommended that such problems should, if possible, be tackled through a voluntary code and the Law Society of Scotland has been trying to broker such a code. However, talks have now been suspended while Homes for Scotland consults its members. I hope that Homes for Scotland will develop constructive proposals and a way forward, but we will certainly monitor that, with legislation as a backstop should progress not be made.

Helen Eadie: I know that the minister is aware that I have been pursuing this matter tenaciously for a long time. I think that I have been persevering for four years by sending letters and having meetings with Malcolm Chisholm and Johann Lamont. I am concerned that although my constituents pay deposits on houses and are given dates of entry, the dates are seldom met. In some of the worst examples, they have been kept waiting for 18 months for entry, which means that they have had to take up alternative accommodation and put their furniture into storage. In the worst case, a cost of in excess of £20,000 was incurred. That concerns me enormously. I am not reassured by the answer that I have received from Homes for Scotland and I do not think that the Law Society is taking the matter on board.

The Presiding Officer: A little question, please.

Helen Eadie: Will the minister see whether there is a way to expedite a resolution? I do not think that the voluntary approach is working.

Des McNulty: The problem is that if we were to legislate for a fixed entry date, the implication would be that damages would be payable if the date was missed, but that could be due to factors that are beyond the builder's control. To insure against all risk of delay could drive up the price of new houses generally. We would need to be satisfied that legislation would be a proportionate response to the scale of the problem. We have attempted to secure a voluntary agreement, which we hope will deliver the necessary change, but I

do not rule out the backstop of legislation, not necessarily in this session, but in the next, which I hope will put further pressure on the various parties to reach an agreement.

Supermarkets (Planning Applications)

6. Mr Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): To ask the Scottish Executive what its role is in deciding whether appeals against the rejection of planning applications for supermarkets proceed to public local inquiry. (S2O-11577)

The Deputy Minister for Communities (Des McNulty): When a planning appeal is lodged, if either the appellant or the planning authority wishes it, the Scottish ministers must give them the opportunity to be heard by an appointed person—in other words, by an inquiry reporter. That applies to all types of development, not just to supermarkets. If neither party wishes an inquiry or hearing, the case will normally proceed by an exchange of written submissions unless, in the particular circumstances of a case, the Scottish ministers consider an inquiry or hearing to be necessary.

Mr Ruskell: The minister will no doubt be aware of the Executive's involvement in an application for a supermarket in Crieff, where ministers—before Des McNulty took up his post—overturned a decision that had been made by the local council, and which followed extensive and long-standing consultation of the community about a preferred site for a retail development in the town. How does the minister justify the Executive's action in overruling the democratically determined wishes of the community, with the result that a cherished town-centre green space, which also has an economic use, will be replaced by an unwanted development?

Des McNulty: It is difficult for me to respond to a specific question about a planning application of which I was not given prior notice—I was not involved in the determination.

Under the Planning etc (Scotland) Act 2006, the Scottish ministers, rather than the appellant or planning authority, will decide whether oral proceedings are necessary. Decisions will be made on the basis of the issues that must be examined. Much of the evidence in major cases could be examined through written submissions. We will reserve hearings for cases in which opinions need to be expanded in an inquiry process in which adversarial examination is necessary. An appeal will no longer proceed exclusively through one process. Implementation of that element of the 2006 act will require secondary legislation, which I expect to introduce now that the act has received royal assent.

Procedures Committee (Sixth to Ninth Reports 2006)

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): The next item of business is a debate on motion S2M-5311, in the name of Donald Gorrie, on behalf of the Procedures Committee, on its sixth, seventh, eighth and ninth reports of 2006.

14:56

Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD): The Procedures Committee's reports respond to requests that were made by other committees. We have proposed four sets of changes to standing orders. None of the proposals will result in epoch-making excitement, but they will usefully tidy up the Parliament's procedures.

First, I will deal with the report entitled "Members' Interests (Parliamentary Determinations and Resolutions)". A few months ago, the Parliament got excited about determinations, but nobody knew exactly what they were. The Standards and Public Appointments Committee, under whose auspices determinations come, asked the Procedures Committee to set out the parliamentary rules for dealing with them. "Determinations" is merely a technical word for resolutions passed by the Parliament on things such as standards of behaviour. Our report is a response to the Standards and Public Appointments Committee. The rules that we propose are in line with what the committee has proposed, but members may be happy to hear that that committee will have to consult members before determinations are proposed to the chamber.

The eighth report deals with consolidation bill procedure, which is an even more recondite—I hope that I pronounced that correctly—matter. The Parliament has learned from the one consolidation bill that it has dealt with, and the Procedures Committee has made several suggestions in light of that experience. The committee has dealt with the difference between consolidation and codification, which is an even more obscure matter. A consolidation bill restates the law in a particular area, but it cannot contain any new law. Codification is the process of restating existing law, but amendments can be made to make that law more relevant. Parliamentary procedures exist to deal with both processes so that proper scrutiny rather than overscrutiny occurs. I am not talking about ordinary bills; usually, the processes are used merely to restate the law in more modern language.

The ninth report deals with the so-called 20-day rule. The Subordinate Legislation Committee asked the Procedures Committee whether it could

have slightly longer to consider certain issues so that that would fit in with its work cycle. Following consultation with lead committees, we reached a reasonable solution, which has been generally accepted. Currently, the Subordinate Legislation Committee must report on instruments within 20 days. We suggest that it should normally report within 20 days, but that the time limit could be extended to 22 days, which would fit in with the Subordinate Legislation Committee's meetings without stealing too much time from the other committees that must consider the instruments.

Finally, I turn to the sixth report, "Public Bills and Substitution", which is perhaps of more interest to some members, given that it relates to committee substitution. The issue grew like Topsy. It started with a request about what to do about a member who had lodged a member's bill and who was also a member of the committee that would scrutinise the bill. It then grew to include areas such as the position of Government ministers and substitutions in general, including what the reasonable grounds for substitution are.

In our report, we propose a system of substitutes to address the situation that was set out in the original request. We propose that substitution can be made for the part of the meeting during which the bill is debated. The member can withdraw for consideration of the bill and the substitution can be made, but the member can continue to take part in consideration of other agenda items. We also set out the rules by which parties can arrange substitution, the arrangements for which depend on the size of the group. I think that our proposal in that respect is fair. The existing substitution system, under which the member who is substituted for has to miss the whole of a meeting, works. However, we decided to change the rules to allow substitution to be made a bit more sensibly.

I turn to the slightly peculiar wording in the rules that sets out what happens when a member resigns from a committee, the effect of which is to create a gap before a substitution can be made. If a member resigns unexpectedly or is very ill, the new rules will allow the substitute to attend meetings straight away.

We also propose that substitution should be allowed if a member is absent on "other Parliamentary business". The current wording, "other business in the Parliament",

does not cover proper parliamentary work that is done outwith the Parliament, such as trips abroad to promote the Parliament. That work will now be counted and a substitute will now be allowed to attend if a member is absent for that sort of reason.

At the moment, if a member is unable to attend committee because of “adverse weather conditions”, they have a legitimate reason for demanding a substitute. We propose changing the wording to read

“adverse travel conditions beyond the member’s control”.

That will cover circumstances such as the railways being all fouled up or a member being caught in the fog at Heathrow. We have broadened the wording of the conditions under which substitution is allowed.

I believe that we have made sensible suggestions. As I said, the reports were produced in response to committee requests. We consulted ministers and discussed some of the proposed wording with them. I think that they are satisfied with the proposed changes. None of this is very exciting, but it is useful progress for the Parliament. I am happy to commend to the Parliament the four reports and the relevant changes to standing orders that they set out. If agreed to, the changes will take effect from 22 December.

I move,

That the Parliament notes the Procedures Committee’s 6th Report, 2006 (Session 2), *Public Bills and Substitution* (SP Paper 652), 7th Report, 2006 (Session 2), *Members’ Interests (Parliamentary Determinations and Resolutions)* (SP Paper 659), 8th Report, 2006 (Session 2), *Consolidation Bill Procedure* (SP Paper 676) and 9th Report, 2006 (Session 2), *Rule 10.3.2 (the “20-day rule”)* (SP Paper 685) and agrees that the changes to Standing Orders set out in Annexe A to each of these reports be made with effect from 22 December 2006.

15:03

Alasdair Morgan (South of Scotland) (SNP): I will be fairly brief. I will throw away my lengthy prepared speech.

I welcome the changes and clarifications that are proposed in the “Consolidation Bill Procedure” report. Consolidation bills exist to bring together all the bits of statutes that have been passed in an area over the years, in order to make the law in the area clearer for everyone who has to deal with it. I consider it a shame, therefore, given one or two substantial Executive bills that were brought before the Parliament lately and which substantially amended legislation by inserting whole new sections, that the opportunity was not taken to consolidate the legislation. I know that the committees involved found it difficult to consult on bills that effectively just inserted huge chunks into legislation of 10 years or so standing. Such bills when passed are also much more difficult for users of the legislation to deal with. I know that it takes more time to draft consolidation bills, but I make a plea to the Executive to consider whether it would be sensible to consolidate the existing

legislation when it introduces major bills in the future.

As a former member of that august body, the Subordinate Legislation Committee—my time on which I enjoyed greatly—I am sure that, under certain circumstances, the extra two days that will be available as a result of the proposed change to the 20-day rule will be helpful.

The clarification that has been provided on parliamentary determinations, particularly as they relate to the Interests of Members of the Scottish Parliament Act 2006, is most helpful. I was one of the members who caused a bit of a stushie on the subject during the Parliament’s consideration of the Interests of Members of the Scottish Parliament Bill. In effect, we were being asked to pass a bill that referred to a procedure the meaning of which none of us was sure about because there was simply no provision in standing orders on how it would be dealt with.

Finally, I turn to the report “Public Bills and Substitution” and who can be on committees that examine bills at stage 2. Given that the Parliament does not have a revising chamber and is not likely to get one—because of the physical constraints of the existing building and the unfortunate reception that any proposal to build an extra building would be likely to receive—it is essential that the detailed scrutiny of bills, which can take place only at stage 2, is carried out by members who are dispassionate and do not have a vested interest in them. The proposed changes are welcome.

The other changes to the rules on substitution are helpful. If we are to have substitution at all, it is essential that we continue to clarify the rules on who should be a substitute, to avoid the unfortunate occurrences that took place after the tragic death of Margaret Ewing, after Mike Rumbles’s resignation from the Health Committee and on the one or two occasions on which members legitimately thought that they were substituting within the rules but found out that they were not. I am grateful that the Procedures Committee has provided clarification on that and I will be happy to support all the proposed amendments.

15:06

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): As I look back over an increasingly lengthy lifespan, I realise that some things that have happened to me are probably punishments for things that I did in a previous life. Appointment to the Procedures Committee is probably an altogether more immediate response.

Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con): No—that was because of what the member has done in this life.

Alex Johnstone: In committee debates, it is traditional to take the opportunity to thank the clerks for their hard work in preparing the report. I am in the unique position of being able to thank the clerks for their hard work in preparing four reports for the purpose of this afternoon's debate. It is surprising for such a large amount of material to be gathered together for one purpose, and it makes one realise how hard the clerks in the Parliament work at times.

Many people might assume that membership of the Procedures Committee is a less than entertaining experience, but we have had some interesting meetings and discussions, which have led to the production of the four excellent reports that I can recommend to the Parliament. I do not intend going through them in great detail, because we have already had the privilege of hearing the convener do that, and later we will be equally privileged to hear the deputy convener sum up at the end of the debate. However, I thought that it would be appropriate for me to mention a few events that took place during the preparation of the reports. Sometimes, even the Procedures Committee can be current and slap bang up to date in reacting to events.

That was the case when we were considering substitution. Our sixth report rightly deals at some length with substitution as it relates to the activities of members who promote their own bills and who are members of committees that consider those bills. As we discussed the suggestions for substitution in such cases—which is an important issue—we found ourselves in an unusual position. I believe that it was Karen Gillon who was not present for that day's meeting. Her substitute Irene Oldfather arrived at the meeting, only to be told that she did not qualify to act as a substitute on that day. Karen Gillon was definitely away on parliamentary business, but because she was not involved in business in the Parliament itself, she was not entitled to be substituted. It was important that the Procedures Committee took the opportunity to address that issue as part of that day's consideration of the subject of substitutions. I am glad that proposals have been made that clarify the position in such situations and simplify one or two other matters.

The committee took the view that the opportunity to provide a substitute should not be widely extended, because the privilege of substituting a committee member should be protected and should operate within fairly narrow limits. The proposed changes will not extend the current limits greatly and will simply allow us to accommodate what we all consider to be important parliamentary business.

I briefly read the Executive's response to the report on consolidation bill procedure. It appears

that the Executive does not entirely agree with the committee proposal that there should be the opportunity to debate consolidation bills at stages 1 and 3. I will not question that response now, but I am interested in hearing the minister's view in more detail at the end of the debate.

When the Procedures Committee was discussing the 20-day rule, I took the view that we should jealously protect the system in the Parliament whereby a strict timetable is adhered to for dealing with subordinate legislation that is subject to the negative procedure. I did not want the timetable to slip, so I supported the committee's initial rejection of the Subordinate Legislation Committee's request that we extend the 20-day period to 25 days. However, I am happy to support the proposal to make it clear that the Subordinate Legislation Committee will normally report to the lead committee within 20 days but that on some occasions it may report up to 22 days after an instrument is laid. That will allow the Subordinate Legislation Committee limited flexibility while helping to maintain a strict timetable for dealing with secondary legislation.

I support the convener of the Procedures Committee and add my support to the proposals for changes to the standing orders.

15:12

Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab): A Procedures Committee debate that addresses several reports on parliamentary procedure might be regarded as a tidying-up exercise and might therefore not be awaited with the anticipation that accompanies a report on parliamentary time. However, it is important to ensure that parliamentary processes work effectively and that there are no controversial proposals.

The proposal that has perhaps been most debated is in our report on public bills and substitution. The proposed approach will create a level playing field for members who introduce bills and ensure that they will not have an additional impact on the bill's consideration by taking part in private committee discussions simply because they happen to be a member of the lead committee. Of course, it is easier for the larger parties to supply substitutes, but the Procedures Committee has made it clear that the recommendation of a substitute, on a motion of the Parliamentary Bureau, will not upset the party balance on the committee, which is crucial. I hope that members agree that the committee struck the right balance. As Alasdair Morgan and Alex Johnstone said, it is also important that we clarify the general rules on substitution, to ensure that there is a consistent approach.

On parliamentary determinations and resolutions on members' interests, the committee thinks that it is sensible to follow the model that was helpfully proposed by the convener of the Standards and Public Appointments Committee, which will allow for appropriate consultation on relevant proposed determinations. We acknowledge that it is for the Parliamentary Bureau to allocate time for debates on motions that will be lodged under the proposed new rule. The allocation system has worked adequately in the past, so the new approach should not present a problem.

Consolidation bill procedure is important, if technical. The Procedures Committee's convener said that the procedure is *recondite*—I do not know what that means, but I am sure that he is right. I commend Murdo Fraser for his diligence when he was convener of the Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries (Consolidation) (Scotland) Bill Committee and thank him for his evidence to the Procedures Committee. Again, the Procedures Committee has emphasised the need for flexibility by proposing that the rules be changed to make it clear that there will normally be no debate at stages 1 and 3, rather than having an absolute prohibition on such debates.

Flexibility also informed the committee's approach to the rule that the Subordinate Legislation Committee must report on statutory instruments within 20 days of their being laid. The Subordinate Legislation Committee said that it needed greater flexibility, not least because of its significant workload. The Procedures Committee's recommendation is to substitute a deadline of no later than 22 days for the previous deadline of 20 days. That sensible change will accommodate the Subordinate Legislation Committee's needs and the demands on the parliamentary schedule.

I hope that Parliament will agree that the Procedures Committee has taken a sensible approach and has ensured that, for each of the parliamentary procedures that we have considered, our recommended changes will be improvements and will offer a flexible approach that will allow the procedures to work in the most expeditious way in the specific circumstances with which they deal. I commend enthusiastically to Parliament each and every one of the reports.

15:15

Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con): As I have listened to the members who have spoken so far, I have been reminded of the real debt that the rest of us owe to those who serve on the Procedures Committee. The reports that it has put before us are excellent—Solomon in all his wisdom did not produce such documents. The committee has arrived at proposals that will undoubtedly improve the workings of the Parliament. For example, on

the proposals on substitute members, there is no doubt whatever that the existing procedure has caused problems because the rules are far too rigorous and are not reasonable. Overall, there is little that I can say to add to the debate. The proposals are completely sensible and I congratulate the committee on its work. We certainly do not wish to delay the progress of the changes.

15:16

Carolyn Leckie (Central Scotland) (SSP): It is great when there is an outbreak of festive consensus. I place on record my support for the Procedures Committee's work. In my previous life as a Unison branch secretary, I was a bit of an anorak when it came to rules, standing orders and constitutions. I understand how important it is to get rules right rather than have them act as a barrier to achieving the aim of ensuring that the organisation—whether it is a Parliament, a trade union or a political party—works and does what it is supposed to do. I congratulate all the members of the Procedures Committee on their dogged work.

The Scottish Socialist Party sees nothing contentious in the proposals, which are helpful. However, I want to mention one issue that arises in my head. I hope that the members of the Procedures Committee or those who are better versed than I am in the Parliament's procedures will be able to help me with it, as they may have considered it.

The proposed rule change on substitutes refers to having regard to the balance between Executive and non-Executive parties in the composition of a committee, which is a natural and right concern. However, the report does not deal with the situation, of which several parties have experience—the Tories have very contemporary experience of it—when members change their political allegiance, leave or are turfed out of a party. Using the size of the political parties when the Parliament is convened, they are given a set number of committee places and are offered convenerships and places on particular committees. However, a member who takes up a place on that basis but then leaves the party can choose not to resign from the committee, which changes the political balance in the committee. There does not seem to be anything in the rules or procedures to deal with that situation.

I want to provoke a bit of a debate about whether it is right not to continue to reflect the balance in the membership of committees and the convenerships that the electorate voted for in the election. I seek comments from Procedures Committee members about whether they have discussed the issue and, if so, whether they might

return to it. Otherwise, the proposals are sensible and I am happy to support them.

15:19

The Minister for Parliamentary Business (Ms Margaret Curran): Like everyone else, I am thrilled to be here this afternoon. I would like to wish everybody a merry Christmas. I would also, genuinely, like to pay respect to the Procedures Committee, whose work interfaces with my responsibilities to a considerable extent. I appreciate the commitment that its members have shown with regard to the significant issues that we have been discussing. I put on record my thanks to the convener, the deputy convener and the members of the committee for the work that they have done in relation to the reports.

The Executive welcomed the opportunities that it was given to contribute to the committee's inquiry. We are pleased that the committee broadened the original inquiry in order to consider the substitution rules in relation not only to member's bills but to Executive and committee bills.

I am sure that all members agree that the committee system is one of the great strengths of the Parliament. The process of accountability is important not only in theory but in practice. It leads to better legislation and we are fundamentally committed to it. Obviously, an effective and reliable substitution system is vital to ensuring a smooth and uninterrupted flow of committee business. We have already documented our support for that.

I welcome the fact that the Procedures Committee proposes the introduction of a new rule that is aimed at preventing an MSP who is in charge of a member's bill or who has lodged a proposal for a member's bill from participating as a member of the committee that is scrutinising that bill.

We faced a number of difficulties as the situation with regard to substitute members developed. I am glad that the committee has now clarified the situation, as there were some misunderstandings about what the position was. We all appreciate the importance of party balance, and we need to ensure that it is properly honoured and respected. I think that the committee has found a way of dealing with that.

As I do not want to eat into any of Karen Gillon's speaking time, I will simply offer my thanks to the committee for the work that it has done, which has helpfully addressed some of the key issues that needed to be considered.

15:22

Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab): I want to put

on record the fact that I am in no way an anorak. I am on the Procedures Committee as a penance for bad acts in a previous life. I am sure that I will be rewarded in heaven for the role that I have played on the committee.

I have some sympathy with Alasdair Morgan's proposal that bills should look at the whole area rather than enter new sections into existing legislation, which can sometimes be confusing. However, the clerks tell me that that would not, strictly speaking, be a consolidation bill as it would combine the consolidation of existing enactments—

Alasdair Morgan: Will the member give way?

Karen Gillon: Willingly.

Alasdair Morgan: I was not talking about a consolidation bill; I was talking about a normal bill that would have the added effect of also consolidating various other pieces of legislation.

Karen Gillon: I hope that the Executive will reflect on that and consider how practice can be improved with future legislation, particularly when we are required to scrutinise detailed bills that impact on a number of acts.

Carolyn Leckie raised a point about committee balance and the role of conveners. We have not considered the issue in any detail, but I understand her point. Obviously, any committee has the right to remove its convener if that is the will of the committee. Committees will make decisions about that for various reasons. However, I appreciate the point that she makes. I am sure that the convener of the Procedures Committee has heard her point and that we will consider the issue as our work progresses.

Alasdair Morgan: Carolyn Leckie's point was interesting. Does Karen Gillon think that the current procedures cater adequately for what happens when the lone representative of a party on a committee changes party? Do we deal correctly with the question of what happens with regard to the substitute member? I am sure that the chamber would be happy to know whether the substitute member would also change in that circumstance and whether the party that the person joined would be entitled to put a new substitute member on the committee.

Karen Gillon: The Procedures Committee was clear that substitution by a member of the same party should not only apply in relation to issues such as the one to do with member's bills. Substitutions should reflect the balance on the committee between Executive and non-Executive parties. For example, if a member is from one of the Executive parties, they should be replaced by another member from one of the Executive parties.

We had a long discussion about the matter and we were clear that no member has the right to nominate a substitute. It is for the Parliamentary Bureau and the Parliament to determine who the substitute should be. The substitution should reflect the balance of the Parliament rather than the needs or concerns of an individual party.

Alasdair Morgan made some powerful points about the fact that we do not have a revising chamber. For that reason, the role of the committees at stage 2 is crucial and, as far as possible, should be seen to be devoid of interference and influence from those who are promoting bills. Bills should be considered as simply and clearly as possible by all members of the committee without the influence of vested interests. Our committees have a good record of doing that, but we were conscious of a potential conflict of interest and we wanted to resolve the matter. That is what the new rule does.

Carolyn Leckie's points were well made and the Procedures Committee will want to consider them further in the next few months as we continue to consider matters that are to be included in our legacy paper.

I think that everything else has been said, Presiding Officer. It would be churlish of me to speak for the sake of it. I am tempted to give you a little carol, but I will not. *[Interruption.]* On behalf of the Procedures Committee, I thank members for coming to the debate. They obviously have very little to do with their time, but I am glad that they find our work so meaningful and worth while. If any Labour member wants to swap, they should come and speak to me later.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): Before we move on to the next item of business, I point out to members yet again that someone has their mobile phone on.

Budget Process 2007-08

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): The next item of business is a debate on motion S2M-5319, in the name of Wendy Alexander, on behalf of the Finance Committee, on its report on stage 2 of the 2007-08 budget process.

15:27

Ms Wendy Alexander (Paisley North) (Lab): Karen Gillon thinks that she has a tough job, but we can perhaps all speculate on why the Finance Committee has been given the final slot in the parliamentary calendar before Christmas. One of the more benign explanations is that the business managers hope that, if tomorrow's press is full of headlines on prudence, efficiency and economy in public finances, they will rub off on all those Scots who are heading to the shops for a last-minute shopping spree.

I fear that we will not be headline news tomorrow morning, but this debate is nonetheless important because it is about the budget that will allocate £25 billion to Scottish public services. I simply note that the budget is larger than that of most member nations of the United Nations. The Finance Committee, at least, is convinced that this debate matters.

As is customary on such occasions, I begin by thanking those who contributed to the Finance Committee's report. In particular, I single out my predecessor as convener of the committee, Des McNulty, who, on this and many other matters, steered the committee ably throughout most of the current four-year session of Parliament and oversaw much of the development of the report. On the committee's behalf, I also thank our budget adviser, Arthur Midwinter, for the expert advice that he gave the committee for almost four years. He worked very conscientiously for a very economical reward and is an asset that will be sadly missed in the future. Thirdly, I thank our clerks, ably led by Susan Duffy, for their tireless work on behalf of the committee.

Last, but not least, I thank the Executive's finance co-ordination team for its efficient responses to our inquiries. The committee wishes to record its appreciation for the team's support during its deliberations.

I turn now to the committee report itself. One area in which the Finance Committee might have already been influential since the publication of the report in the middle of December is that of local government funding. I believe that the committee will wish to welcome the fact that the Executive has heeded our advice and has found resources to rectify some of the challenges in local

government funding in the coming year, thereby exerting downward pressure on council tax levels in 2007-08.

I turn to the matters that are still outstanding. I have only a limited amount of time, so I will dwell on three big issues to emerge from the committee's report: first, overall budget priorities; secondly, the future use of targets; and, thirdly, the draw-down of resources from Her Majesty's Treasury.

Starting with overall budget priorities, the committee recommends that the Executive should take the opportunity provided by the forthcoming spending review to make a clear statement of its overall priorities and to specify how individual programmes contribute to the cross-cutting priorities of growth and closing the opportunity gap. We urge the Executive to publish reports in the 2007 spending review on those cross-cutting priorities, as it did following the 2002 spending review.

Mark Ballard (Lothians) (Green): Can Wendy Alexander confirm that the cross-cutting themes are growth, sustainable development and closing the opportunity gap?

Ms Alexander: Indeed. There are also themes surrounding equal opportunity. I made mention of two priorities, but I happily concur with Mark Ballard on that point.

On the issue of overall priorities, we are anxious to work with the Executive and with other committees to deepen subject committees' understanding of some of the complex financial decisions that relate to their portfolios. We encourage subject committees to seek from the relevant Executive departments appropriate trend data on spending patterns since devolution. Clearly, such trend data are not appropriate for the budget documents, although they will be relevant to subject committees and can aid budget scrutiny, particularly in the tightening financial climate that lies ahead.

Local government finance is another area of overall priority, and the committee urges the Executive to undertake detailed comparisons of grant-aided expenditure provision and local spending levels in the period ahead, with a view to identifying any area of GAE that involves significant overspending or underspending. If every, or nearly every, council diverges from GAE in significant ways, as appears to be the case for children's services, for example, it is important that we consider why that divergence is happening and that we look to revise GAE allocations to reflect emerging spending patterns on the ground.

The second of the three issues is targets. The committee believes that the Executive's budgetary systems need to be developed further to

demonstrate better the linkage between cross-cutting priorities and resource allocation priorities. Looking forward, we think that that means that all portfolio targets that are set for the 2007 spending review should quantify outputs or outcomes and be directly and transparently linked to a specific budget line.

On the performance of spending departments over recent years, we recommend that the Executive provides the Parliament with the outcomes for the original 11 targets from SR 2002, which were subsequently replaced. That would allow a more robust and comprehensive assessment of performance against all the previous targets.

The third area that I wish to discuss is the draw-down of resources from Her Majesty's Treasury. The committee believes that the Executive should, in future, look to specify more precisely not only the components of the draw-down but the priorities that the expenditure is meant to address. We suggest in our report how, technically, that might be done. We do not expect a full answer on that from the minister today, but we hope that, between now and its report back, the Executive will examine the issue in some detail. For the moment, we hope that the minister will indicate whether some of the reserve has been drawn down in the recent local government funding settlement.

I have not dwelt on matters that relate to the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body or to Audit Scotland. Those matters were fully rehearsed during our debate yesterday on accountability.

In my remaining time, I would like to commend to the chamber the sections of the committee's report on equalities issues and how we can make progress on equality budgeting, and to the sections on efficient government and local government funding. I know that colleagues will focus on those issues in their speeches this afternoon.

I conclude on a forward-looking note. The Finance Committee wants to record that it believes that significant progress has been made in the past four years on the budget process as a whole. During the final months of this session of Parliament, the committee is anxious to reflect on the budget process in Parliament and on how it might be strengthened and improved in the third session. The committee wants to look in particular at the role of subject committees and, indeed, at its own role. It is important to use the third session of Parliament to build on the progress made during the second.

15:36

The Minister for Finance and Public Service Reform (Mr Tom McCabe): I begin by welcoming

Wendy Alexander and Gordon Jackson to their new roles. I know that they will bring fresh rigour to the work of the committee, which is most welcome.

I echo Wendy Alexander's appreciation of Des McNulty, who was convener of the committee for around three and a half years and did the job very well indeed. Not only has his work been acknowledged by his colleagues, but it has led in some way, I am sure, to his recent appointment as a Scottish Executive minister. I offer him my sincere thanks and take this opportunity to wish him well in his new responsibilities.

The Finance Committee's report is useful and will undoubtedly make a positive contribution to future engagement between the Executive and the committee. The Executive does not expect, and I do not expect, a parliamentary committee to accept or agree with everything that we do. However, we are pleased—and I personally am pleased—that the committee's report has acknowledged progress not only in the quality of Executive documents but in the quality of the process of scrutinising the annual budget.

I take this opportunity to assure the committee and the chamber that we see the work of the committee as an asset to the work of the Executive. We are committed to working with the committee. Of course there will be differences of opinion from time to time, and there should be robust exchanges, but we fully acknowledge the value of the work that is being done.

That work will be particularly important as we move towards the spending review next year. That will be a critical time not only for our parliamentary process but for the future direction of government and public policy in Scotland. The way in which the Executive works with the body that scrutinises it at that time will be very important indeed.

We will of course respond in detail in writing prior to the stage 1 debate, so I will not deal with every individual point in the committee's report. However, I would like to highlight a few specific points.

The Finance Committee has recommended that portfolio committees adopt a more active approach to budget scrutiny—Wendy Alexander gave more details of that. We welcome that worthwhile recommendation, which will improve overall scrutiny within the Parliament. Scrutiny should not be the role just of the Finance Committee; the portfolio committees also have a very important role to play. It is perhaps easy to make such a recommendation, but we will need to pay a bit more attention to it and take a bit more time to ensure that that more active approach is seen in the Parliament.

We will continue to try to improve the presentation of our documents, as the committee has asked us to do. We attempted to respond to last year's request to concentrate on new resources. However, there was some misunderstanding about exactly what was required. I think that subsequent correspondence has now rectified that. In future years, we will reflect the required change within the budget documents.

As Wendy Alexander rightly said, we will in future years improve our equalities reporting as a result of the disability equality scheme that was published on 4 December. That is an important point. We will publish—*[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: This is the fourth time today that I have had to ask members to switch off their mobile phones.

Mr McCabe: We will publish annual reports on public sector equalities and, to aid clarity, we will ensure that, although those documents will be published along with the budget documents, they will be separate documents in their own right.

A key recommendation of the Finance Committee concerned local government finance. In last week's statement, we responded well to that recommendation, with an additional package of more than £250 million. As a result of productive engagement with local government, we have secured benefits for the people of Scotland from that investment. Council tax levels will fall and council tax collection rates will rise. Greater efficiencies will be secured and further reassurance on the cost of personal care will be provided to the people of Scotland who depend on that policy. Last week's statement means that we have increased the previous year's figures by £393 million. We have gone further than the committee recommended and, in the interests of good governance and good local services, we have ignored some of the more vacuous noises about election bribes.

The Executive shares with the committee the joint aim of improving the understanding, transparency and scrutiny of the budget process. Through the budget, communities will be more confident, services will be of a higher quality and the transformation of Scottish life will continue. We welcome the Finance Committee's report and look forward to working with the committee in future.

15:42

Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP): The Scottish National Party joins the new convener of the Finance Committee and the minister in recording our good wishes to Des McNulty in his forthcoming responsibilities as a minister. In my view, Mr McNulty was a very effective convener of

the Finance Committee, who dealt with the committee's work in a true and outstanding parliamentary fashion. I wish also to thank the clerks for their assistance during the production of the report.

I begin by referring to local government finance. I would be the first to acknowledge that the Government has improved the position on which its original plans were based. More money is being given to local authorities to assist with downward pressure on council tax levels. That is an important objective. I wish that the Government had listened to the Finance Committee in the previous financial year as well; if it had, council tax payers would perhaps have been protected from council tax increases that were, on average, above inflation, as a result of the financial settlement that the Government offered last year.

Mr McCabe: It is worth while for me to remind members that last year produced the lowest average rise in council tax increases since devolution.

Mr Swinney: That is a statement of fact. It may be the outcome of what the minister himself referred to as a "productive engagement" between the Scottish Executive and local government. If the minister was being fair, he would recognise that, for a large proportion of the period since devolution, this Administration has not presided over a constructive and productive engagement with local government. I am glad that the Executive has now embraced such an approach because it will reap the rewards that all of us who argued for it in the first place believed it would produce.

I move on to the efficient government process, of which the Scottish National Party is very supportive. However, we have concerns about whether the process not only appears credible but can be proven to be credible. In its report, the committee said—not for the first time—that it was concerned about whether it was possible to verify the effectiveness of the efficient government programme because of the lack of established baselines against which the process and the achievements that the Government was claiming could be judged. The committee made the same comment a year ago.

In addition, our views have been endorsed in the Audit Scotland report, which was published just the other day and was discussed at the Audit Committee meeting on Tuesday. The Auditor General for Scotland makes it clear that the development of

"Robust baselines ... to ... provide a 'line in the sand' against which improvements can be measured"

is essential if we are to validate the savings that have been reported. The lack of such baselines is an issue of concern.

Mr McCabe rose—

Mr Swinney: I give way to the minister again.

Mr McCabe: In the interests of clarity, let me just quote a section from Audit Scotland's report:

"Improvements in the content of ETNs demonstrate the Executive's commitment to provide greater assurance on the level of savings delivered and on the extent to which gains are achieved without reductions in quality of services."

Mr Swinney: The Audit Scotland report also states that the development of

"Robust baselines ... to ... provide a 'line in the sand' against which improvements can be measured"

is essential if we are to validate the savings that have been reported. Instead of exchanging quotations with me, the minister would be better served by responding to Audit Scotland's criticism and improving the recording process so that we can have a valid debate about what savings are being achieved. We support the efficient government initiative, but, as the Auditor General said, and as the Finance Committee said—not for the first but for the second time—the process must be made more robust so that we see that improvement.

The way in which the Executive draws down resources from Her Majesty's Treasury is an issue that has concerned the committee for a couple of years. I record that the minister gave us a bit more information about the substance of the draw-down, which, in his statement to the Parliament in June, he said was expected to be £780 million over financial years 2006-07 and 2007-08. We asked him to specify what the known pressures were for which he was budgeting. When he reported to the Finance Committee, he provided us with information on about £333 million of the £780 million. If portfolios are facing "known pressures", I cannot understand why the Government cannot share that detail with the Finance Committee openly. We should all be made aware of what those pressures are, what the state of the reserves is at Her Majesty's Treasury and how those reserves will be utilised going forward. I think that we have begun to shine a light on how those resources are used at the Treasury, but we need to have absolute clarity on how that work is undertaken.

One limitation on the ability of the committee and the Parliament to know how effectively public resources and expenditure in Scotland are utilised has been that the Government, after it received the report from the Howat committee, has gone to an extraordinary degree of trouble to prevent the publication of the report. The whole parliamentary process of engagement between the Executive and the Parliament's committees, whereby the Finance Committee seeks to get to the bottom of

how the public's money is used in public spending, would have been much better served if we had been given access to that report. After all, the Howat committee was established not just to inform the spending review but to judge whether all Scottish Executive programmes were delivering adequate performance and adequate value. In his closing remarks, I hope that the Deputy Minister for Finance, Public Service Reform and Parliamentary Business—who I know has had to front up the Howat review in Parliament on several occasions—will set out the Government's plans for early publication of the report so that we can have an informed debate as the draft budget moves through the parliamentary process.

In my view, the Finance Committee report makes some pretty robust arguments about how the Government must improve the way in which it handles public finances, how it manages the efficient government programme and how it utilises the resources that are drawn down from the Treasury. I hope that the Government will pay close attention to the issues that the committee has raised.

15:49

Derek Brownlee (South of Scotland) (Con):

The scrutiny of the draft budget has, once again, been a long process. Like other members, I pay tribute to the committee's clerks, to the people who gave evidence to the committee and to Des McNulty, who, as convener, was very able at squeezing out information that was relevant to our deliberations. I wonder whether his promotion was as much to do with his having caused difficulty for the Executive as with his ability. In that respect, I only hope that the current convener also proves difficult for the Executive.

I was particularly glad that the committee went to Dumfries to take evidence from local organisations about aspects of the Scottish budget, because one danger for Government in Scotland is the feeling that it is too central-belt biased. Most committee members who went to Dumfries found it a useful occasion, and I know that local groups that gave their views found it useful to have an interaction about the problems that they face. I hope that some lessons have been learned at a national level from the challenges that are faced in some of our remote regions.

Wendy Alexander talked about some of the recommendations in the report. She is right to say that those on the ombudsmen and the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body were fully aired yesterday, so I will not dwell on them either.

One aspect of the budget that gave us concern was targets. They are a much-vexed area in

budgeting, and all of us have had some concerns about the robustness of the targets and their measurement. Members come at the issue from different perspectives, but the committee has drawn out some valid points.

Let me give an example. There was particular concern about targets that have changed. The Justice Department's target number 1 was originally a 5 per cent reduction in serious violent crime by 2003-04. According to the analysis of targets in the draft budget report, that was replaced because it was difficult to measure and because 2002-03 had the highest recorded levels of serious violent crime.

Notwithstanding the reasons for changing the target, its replacement was to

"increase the police clear-up rate for serious violent crime"—

we would all endorse that as a valuable target—with the

"Desired level of improvement to be discussed with police forces."

We can all agree that improving the clear-up rate is a valuable direction of travel, but a process that allows those responsible for meeting a target to be so explicitly involved in setting it does not strike me as being as robust as it could or should be.

Some of the other targets that were replaced were perhaps more favourable. One in particular that caught my attention was the ninth target in the tourism, culture and sport portfolio, which was changed to

"Increase the number of cultural successes by 3 per cent by end March 2008".

On that, the Executive deserves some credit, as it is well on the way to meeting the target, and calling in its aid the collective efforts of "Balamory", Gordon Ramsay and Rory Bremner. We should give credit where it is due, although we can perhaps reflect on whether that was a particularly wise target to change to in the first place.

The key question on the budget for those outside the chamber—it should be the key question here, too—is the extent to which we achieve value for money for the significant sums that are spent in Scotland. On that, the jury is very much out.

Mr Swinney was right to mention the Howat review. We have covered it many times, but we have still not had the appropriate answers. For example, we still do not understand why the Howat review is relevant to the spending review but not to this year's budget. The Howat review was based on last year, and we still do not know whether any of the decisions taken by ministers have been influenced by it. Of course, ministers

have had the benefit of seeing it, which those of us on the Opposition benches have not. If there are problems in any area of Executive spending, it would be much better if the Executive was open about them so that we could have a robust discussion about how they might be dealt with. I repeat previous calls for the Executive to publish the Howat review as soon as possible, because I cannot see how it can be relevant to the future but not to the budget that we are currently considering.

Mr Swinney also referred to the efficient government initiative, and the key question is whether we can achieve more from the efficiency targets than we are currently delivering. In the past year, the Government has not published a single new technical note on efficiencies—it seems odd in the grand scheme of things that not a single new idea has emerged from a Government that is so keen on efficient government.

Mr Swinney was also right to mention baselines, because gross savings may disappear. That might throw into question the funding of the council tax freeze that he is so keen on, as he appears to be casting doubt on some of the savings that he is relying on for that, but I will quickly move on from that point.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You will quickly finish, Mr Brownlee.

Derek Brownlee: Wendy Alexander mentioned the future, which is a fundamental point. The budget process as it is may well be better than it has been in the past, but it must improve. We have to involve other committees and all MSPs in improving it. The legacy paper that the Finance Committee produces may well turn out to be one of the most significant documents published by the committee this session.

15:55

Mr Andrew Arbuckle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD): Like other members of the Finance Committee, I thank the clerks and the support staff. I also thank our departed convener, Des McNulty, for setting us on course in our scrutiny of the draft budget and I wish him well in his new role. In particular, I congratulate the Finance Committee's new convener on analytically scything through the figures and detailing where we would like improvements to be made.

Derek Brownlee has a point when he says that in considering the budget for the forthcoming year it is best to look at the situation outside the building. Hardly a week goes past without a major capital project coming to completion. Those projects are renewing Scotland's infrastructure, whether they are new waterworks, flyovers or hospital extensions. Those works come after a

period of stagnation and underinvestment in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

When I visit schools I see some of the results of improved investment in education. Last week, I visited an elderly friend in hospital and again saw the benefits of increased funding from the Scottish Executive.

The figure for the budget has been quoted as £25 billion. In a quiet moment during the preceding Procedures Committee debate, I worked out that that means that £1 million is spent every 17 minutes; £2 million of Scottish Executive money was spent during the Procedures Committee debate.

The Tories may gripe that the current percentage level of public expenditure is not healthy for a nation's economy, but it is essential after their years of parsimony and neglect.

Although this may be close to self-congratulation, I believe that the Finance Committee's conclusions and its recommendations on the coming year's budget will, if taken on board by the Executive, improve the transparency and accountability of Government. As the convener of the Finance Committee said, there is in particular a need for a clear statement of overall priorities and an equally clear statement on how additional spending would attain those priorities.

The committee would also like much more definition within the section of the draft budget on cross-cutting expenditure, so that the effectiveness of such spending can be monitored and measured.

As Derek Brownlee said, the Finance Committee is encouraging other committees to become more involved in examining the spending plans of the Executive and to use spending trends as part of their budget scrutiny.

Looking forward to this year's proposed expenditure, it is particularly pleasing for me to see increased funding for local authorities. As somebody with a foot in the local authority camp, I know that they are facing real challenges in meeting the demands now made on them. Therefore, the increased award to councils is welcome.

As Wendy Alexander pointed out, in another recommendation the Finance Committee has asked the Executive to look more closely at grant-aided expenditure within local authorities and to establish whether it is going to the right place and is operating as effectively as it could. Many of the challenges within local authorities are being brought about by the increased longevity of our population. We have a higher percentage of people aged 80 or over than we have ever had in

Scotland's history. Our commitment to care for older people requires considerable funding, so this year's increase in aggregate external finance is welcome.

Another major challenge for local councils is the size of the support packages that are now needed to ensure that the policy of social inclusion is properly carried out; six-figure sums are not unusual in that sector for annual care and support. That must be recognised.

The Finance Committee's recommendations are well made and are designed to improve the openness and transparency of Government. I believe that the budget for the coming year is a good budget for Scotland and I am sure that the people of Scotland will recognise that in May.

15:59

Mr Andrew Welsh (Angus) (SNP): On behalf of all members of the Parliament and the general public, I congratulate the Finance Committee and thank it for its work, which is appreciated.

Local government is important in the everyday lives of citizens and is a fundamental element of our democracy. However, by definition local government is unable to raise its own budget. It is constantly making and mending in the face of a council tax that is inadequate for the task and plainly unfair to the citizens who pay it; ring fencing; new burdens; and annual settlements that match up neither to the tasks that are allocated to councils nor to the demands that are placed on them. For a long time, local government has been underfunded for the tasks that central Government sets it. Besides the bureaucracy that is involved in best value, performance criteria, league tables and other central Government demands, new responsibilities are constantly being given to it. In a country the size of Scotland there are surely more efficient and effective ways of running the local government system and dovetailing it into national Government finances.

The legacy inherited from Westminster must be radically modernised and made fit for the 21st century. Finance is a good starting point. Indeed, we would all be better off if central Government puts its financial house in order first. Rather than ever-increasing demands and a failure centrally to fund services properly, I would like a clear definition of what local government is for and is expected to do, and a much clearer view of the source of finance that would allow it to do that.

Mr McCabe: The member's concern for local government is admirable, but how will it get on after the Scottish National Party has stripped £1.2 billion out of the resources that are available to it by capping local income tax at 3 per cent and freezing council tax for the next two years?

Mr Welsh: Under an SNP Government, local authorities will be properly funded. I had expected ministers to talk other than nonsense in the chamber; I was used to that at Westminster, but I do not like to hear it in Scotland. I put it to the minister that the extra money that he is producing for 2007-08 comes with no guarantee of continuity. Are those funds part of mainstream local authority budgets from now on, or are they simply one-off payments?

The Deputy Minister for Finance, Public Service Reform and Parliamentary Business (George Lyon) rose—

Mr Welsh: I want to develop my point, as the deputy minister will have a chance to sum up. I would like him to address the issue when he does so.

My next point concerns the money for free personal care. The Community Care and Health (Scotland) Act 2002 is not clear about the responsibilities involved, what exactly is devolved to local government and whether or not those functions are properly funded. Government ministers should be able to address those points. Will the minister today provide a proper definition of free personal care, which would allow an accurate assessment of the adequacy of the extra funding that is being supplied for these fundamental services to be made? The Finance Committee, too, emphasised the need for clarity and accountability, and it was wise to do so.

Will the minister comment specifically on the £61 million of extra capital for efficiency savings that is linked to revenue? How exactly does he intend the system to work? Where will the efficiency savings have to be generated? If such savings involve an authority's roads department, they will be longer-term revenue savings, rather than more immediate revenue savings that relate to the following year. However, they may be the most effective and efficient solution for the council involved. Will the minister make clear how the savings will be implemented and whether he intends to reward only shorter-term fixes that are made next year but not beyond that? Local government should be looked at in the medium to long term. I deeply regret the fact that that has not been the case in the past.

I am also interested in knowing whether the minister intends to take into account whether local authorities have a proven track record of efficiency in using their finances. Squeezes on local authorities are sometimes not targeted in the right direction. What allowance will the minister make for councils that already perform well in every one of the five categories of priority that he expects authorities to address? It is important to reward authorities for past financial prudence, rather than to punish already efficient authorities. Those are

specific questions that local government and I would like to hear answered.

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): I will develop the member's point further. If the SNP caps local government council tax rates because efficiency savings have been achieved, is it not the case that councils that are already efficient will have no money to maintain the cap? Will not tax increases or cuts in services be required?

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh): One minute, Mr Welsh.

Mr Welsh: Angus Council has one of the lowest council taxes—and always has had, under SNP administration—yet it is always in the top five, right across the whole range of services. I call that good management, and it is something that I would recommend to other authorities.

Scotland's local authorities are rightly worried that the 2007-08 extra money will come with no guarantee of continuation in their mainstream funding budgets, especially from a central Government system that demands of local government an economy, effectiveness and efficiency that it does not operate in its own budget.

George Lyon: Will the member give way?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I have already told Mr Welsh that he is in his last minute.

Mr Welsh: That point about central Government accountability and financial prudence was repeated in this year's report.

Given the £2.1 billion that has been thrown at the McCrone settlement, Scottish hospital consultant contracts based on no Scottish data whatsoever and transport spending before a transport strategy was created, with no clue as to value for money or measures of effectiveness, as well as other instances of such spending by the Executive, what we need, although it is something of an afterthought, are financial resolutions at the forefront of Government legislation, budgeted for as part of a well-thought-out financial solution to legislative desire. If we did that, we would all benefit, but I have not seen it yet.

16:06

Mark Ballard (Lothians) (Green): Wendy Alexander said that this final slot before the recess had become a bit of a Christmas tradition for the Finance Committee. John Swinney talked about the things that appear in this year's Finance Committee report that also appeared in previous Finance Committee reports, so, to some extent, this is not only the traditional slot but also my traditional speech, because it will focus on the

same things that the Finance Committee has talked about this year and in previous years. It will be about the Executive's priorities, its key challenges and how they relate to the cross-cutting themes laid out in its budget documents.

Looking through the two documents, I am struck by the four key challenges that are based on the 2002 targets: growing the economy; delivering excellent public services; building stronger, safer communities; and revitalising our democracy. Those challenges are then linked in some rather unclear way with the five key priority areas: growing the economy, which is the same; reforming criminal justice and promoting respect; improving the nation's health; improving educational attainment; and safeguarding the environment. Then, on top of those key challenges and key priorities, we have a set of cross-cutting themes—originally three, now four—which are: growing the economy; closing the opportunity gap; promoting equality; and sustainable development.

Although it is true that growing the economy is consistently a priority, a challenge and a cross-cutting theme, the rest of the priorities, challenges and themes cover a wide range of different issues. The problem with the budget documents is that it is impossible to analyse how those priorities, challenges and cross-cutting themes actually relate to the spending decisions that are being made.

The Finance Committee has as ever produced an excellent report this year, and has laid out the issue clearly in paragraphs 37 and 39. The problem for the Finance Committee is that the Executive has never defined what "priority" means in terms of resources. We have those cross-cutting themes, but how they relate to existing spend or to the additional spend is never made clear. Paragraph 39 states:

"The Committee expected the Minister to be able to say how these allocations were reflective of the Executive's priorities rather than a bland assertion that they were. This is not evidence based decision making."

That is the problem that we have with the budget. It is not clear how all those things relate to how the money is spent.

I would like to give an example from the budget document. It says that sustainable development is one of the cross-cutting themes, and if one looks through the document at the narratives, one ends up at the education section, where there is an £800 million budget and a firm commitment of £125,000 towards the eco-schools project. That £125,000 is welcome, but when it becomes the only evidence of a cross-cutting theme's impact on £800 million, we have to question the purpose and impact of those themes.

That relates to the points that Wendy Alexander and others made about targets. I ask the minister to respond to the comments in paragraphs 106 and 107 of the report that it is a major shortcoming of the current reporting system that one cannot relate the priorities to the targets, which change halfway through the process, which means that targets that are set out in 2002 disappear and are replaced by new 2005-08 targets. No data come back on the targets, so we cannot tell what is their impact on spend.

Until we get that information, a debate in this slot of the session will not ensure transparent and accountable budget setting. If we do not have the information on how the Executive's priorities apply to financial decisions, all that we can do is repeat our concerns about where the cross-cutting themes and priorities have an impact.

There are genuine concerns. Andrew Arbuckle mentioned the problems of local government funding. My colleague Robin Harper has repeatedly challenged the First Minister on issues surrounding funding for children's social work and the massive funding gap between what local authorities spend on those services and what they are given by central Government. We still cannot drill down into the documents to see the impact of Government decisions on core services.

The Environment and Rural Development Committee was right to express concern that significant change in budgets is not dealt with properly. The budget revisions and central unallocated provision mean that it is difficult for committees to make like-for-like comparisons between where money has been spent in the previous year and where it will be spent in the next year.

Although it is good that we have a budget process and that there have been improvements in the clarity of budget documents, we still have a long way to go before we can claim that the current budget process gives the Finance Committee and the other committees the opportunity to interact with the budget and challenge the Executive on the relationship between what it says that it will do with the money and what it does with it.

16:12

Gordon Jackson (Glasgow Govan) (Lab): I am speaking as a member of the committee that presented the report, without having taken any part in the work that went into it or in the preparation of the report itself—nothing new there, some might say. I joined the committee only as the report was being finalised and, until then, had never thought much about the budget process at

all. I confess that I find the whole thing quite difficult.

It is clear from listening to other members that we are discussing complicated issues and a complicated process. I say sincerely that I am full of admiration for the other members of the committee, the clerks and everyone who knows their way around this material, because I do not. I will therefore not have anything to say about the technicalities of the process. Members are welcome to intervene and ask me about them, but I will not be able to answer, so they should not bother.

Having been forced to speak—note the word forced—I had another look at the report, in what I confess was a very simplistic way, and some lay things stood out. For example, I read with interest a discussion on health spending when Mr McCabe gave evidence to the committee. If I have understood it right, the situation seems to be that of the extra money coming to Scotland as a result of the United Kingdom budget, a large percentage—about two thirds—went on health spending, which means that there has been a significant increase in real money terms of £483 million. To me, as a layman, that was obviously a good thing. Govan is an inner city area with a degree of deprivation and there are real concerns about health issues there. Many people are simply not as healthy as they could or should be. That is why a development at the Southern general is fantastic. The development of a gold-standard service with every modern facility is welcome.

As a lay observer of the process, it struck me that increasing spending on health was worth applauding—full stop, end of story. That was why I was surprised when I read the exchanges with the minister. I mean Mark Ballard no disrespect, but I think that he was involved in those exchanges. I confess that I do not have a detailed understanding of matters, but there was apparent concern that spending such a high percentage of the new money on health might not be the right thing to do. I think that it was said that the best way to grow the Scottish economy would be to make more money available to do so. The implication seemed to be that the money would have been better spent on promoting economic growth, as economic growth should be the number 1 priority. There are technical arguments for supporting that view, and I do not disagree that investment to grow the economy is needed, but I agreed with the minister. I do not always agree with him, but I did so then.

Mr McCabe: The member nearly always agrees with me.

Gordon Jackson: Indeed. The minister said:

"our health service requires significant investment and ... we are determined to meet the major health challenges, including the three killer diseases that have a particular impact on people throughout Scotland. By doing so, we will enable our health service to make a significant impact on our economic growth and quality of life."—[*Official Report, Finance Committee*, 6 November 2006; c 4052-53.]

Nothing is more important for ordinary people than improving health care, particularly in deprived areas, but it seems to me that improving health care cannot be divorced from the direct effects of economic growth. In simplistic terms, healthy people work better and are more likely to be economically active if there are fewer health concerns for them and their families. I thought that improving health care would be a good thing economically.

Mark Ballard: Will the member take an intervention?

Gordon Jackson: Please intervene. I am glad that someone wants to do so.

Mark Ballard: Gordon Jackson mentioned that I questioned the Minister for Finance and Public Service Reform at the Finance Committee's meeting in Dumfries. I sought clarification of the link between the Executive's stated priorities and the increased spending. If the Executive's number 1 priority is to improve the health of the nation, it would make sense for most of the money to go on health. I simply tried to test the links between the Executive's stated priorities and where money is going. I fully support spending more money on health—that is great—but I wondered how doing that related to the Executive's priorities.

Gordon Jackson: I understand what the member has said, but, as a layperson, I found the pigeonholing that occurred to be unhelpful. Of course economic growth is the Executive's priority, but that does not seem to me to exclude spending a lot of the new money on health. It seemed to me that there was pigeonholing in a way that was not accurate, acceptable or commonsensical. If I were politically minded, I would say that we would not have such a debate next year if my colleagues in the Scottish National Party got their way because the new money would disappear; there would not be much of a debate on how the new money would be divided because it would not exist. However, bearing in mind what someone said earlier, making such comments would have more to do with electioneering than finance.

I do not really understand the rest of the issues, but I am glad that the report highlighted what is being done with the new money as far as the health service is concerned. I will not go into the technicalities that are involved, but I commend the report for that reason if for no other.

16:18

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): As a former member of the Finance Committee and in the light of the kind request that I received to speak in the debate, I sympathise with Gordon Jackson.

I want to raise a wider issue, which does not relate only to the process. My views have been formed not only by my experience as a member of the Finance Committee, but by my experience as a member of the Steel commission, which was chaired by the former Presiding Officer of the Parliament. I have considered the constitution and the Scottish Parliament's powers, and the relationships between the Parliament and local government, which Mr Welsh focused on, and civic society.

The debate on the process should cover two other issues that have not been discussed. We should all recognise one of the lessons that I learned early on when I was a member of the Finance Committee. The Parliament can intervene in what happens to only the 15 to 20 per cent of the annual budget that is discretionary and flexible. Much of a budget is already committed in the long term, whether that is on capital plans, staffing levels, the employment of teachers, or health. The overall flexibility for the Parliament is limited.

I turn to the second point, on which I will touch only briefly. Our ability in the Parliament to affect expenditure in the Scottish budget is limited. However, it is interesting to make a comparison of our overall levels of expenditure and tax base with those in other Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development countries. For example, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden have a much higher tax burden than that of the UK and Scotland.

In any debate on expenditure in the Scottish budget, we cannot have a genuine debate on the size of overall expenditure. As much as any member on the Conservative and other benches may say that they want to see smaller Government and less Government interference or expenditure, the genuineness of the debate is lacking. That is because no one is calling for cuts or saying that Scotland wants to have a tax base that is more akin to that of Finland or Sweden. A comparison between the United Kingdom and other OECD countries shows that the overall tax burden for the UK, when expressed as total tax receipts as a percentage of gross domestic product, is 35.8 per cent. For Finland, the figure is 45.9 per cent; and for Sweden, 50.2 per cent. That is the context of the overall debate.

I was interested to read the conclusions and recommendations that the Finance Committee

made in its report. I commend the committee on the thoroughness of its work. I was struck by some of the consistent features that arose during the time that I was a committee member, not least of which were the repeated appeals to the Executive for it to do more work to make clear its expenditure, particularly on cross-cutting areas. I have considerable sympathy with that, although I accept that doing so is not an easy task. Since the time at which I was a member of the committee, considerable improvement has been made in that regard.

When I left the committee, it had just begun its inquiry into cross-cutting expenditure. The work that the committee undertook in producing that report, and also that which it put into the report that is the subject of the debate, led to the Executive putting in place new systems to demonstrate the linkages between cross-cutting priorities and resource allocations. One of the areas where the debate is still weak is that we do not have an alternative budget. Our procedures limit what we can do in that regard. It would be great to have an SNP alternative budget.

Derek Brownlee: I think that many people consider that the level of debate would be raised if we were able to discuss various budget options. In that regard, would it not be helpful if, in addition to Government ministers having sight of the Howat review on the failures of the current budget, Opposition members were also to have access to it?

Jeremy Purvis: The point about whether or not alternatives are put before the Parliament is this: year on year, the Conservatives and the SNP tell the chamber that, because they do not have access to a civil service resource, internal reviews or mechanisms, they cannot put forward alternative budgets. It is funny how those budgets materialise just before an election campaign, but that is how it is.

In its updated, pre-UK budget report, the SNP said that it had made the most thorough investigation of and case for independence. Its members then come to this place and say that the party does not have the resources to put together an annual budget. We are talking here about only one part of the budget—its spending plans. I do not want SNP members to get me wrong: I think that it has spending plans—boy, does it have spending plans. For example, it has earmarked £1.7 billion for writing off English student debt, and £1.5 billion for making a reduction in corporation tax. Those spending plans sit alongside its plans for cuts in fuel tax, whisky duty, and a cap on council tax—the list is almost limitless.

If the SNP wants to put forward a collated budget document in which it sets out both revenue and expenditure, I would welcome that, as we

could then scrutinise its budget proposals. I will take just one example: the SNP's plans for a 10 per cent cut in corporation tax. Any consideration of the level of business taxation is valid. However, one has to be honest in how one presents it. The SNP plans would rely on business profits going up by 10 per cent year on year to compensate for the reduction in revenue from corporation tax. The SNP is not saying that that is likely to happen. We want to know where the SNP will find the alternative revenue to compensate for the £380 million reduction in revenue that will result, year on year, from its proposed cut in corporation tax.

Jim Mather (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): Has the member paid any attention to the recent report by the Economic Research Institute of Northern Ireland, which shows that a dramatic and crudely executed reduction in corporation tax from 30 per cent to 12 per cent would result in a ballooning of overall tax revenues in Northern Ireland? That finding has been accepted by the totality of the political spectrum in Northern Ireland.

Jeremy Purvis: There is a case for saying that having lower taxation overall results in more revenue in the long term, but my point is that the SNP should be honest in its presentation and say that benefits would accrue only in the long term. Interestingly, the UK has a lower tax base than all the countries that Mr Mather cites as being better off than us. There is an argument for reducing corporation tax, but the SNP must be honest by presenting the case for it on a year-by-year basis and explaining that the benefits will not be achieved overnight. It would be more honest if the SNP said in its tax proposals that Scottish businesses would grow by 10 per cent year on year, but it does not say that.

I will give a final example of how the budget process would be helped by the submission of clear alternatives. At 11.55 this morning, the SNP's Maureen Watt attacked scare stories that oil would come to an end—the implication being that, under the SNP, oil would be limitless. At 12.29, Fergus Ewing cried out to know where the Deputy First Minister would get the money for the transport plans in Scotland. On the one hand, we are told that we have limitless oil and a £27 billion surplus since 1979 but, on the other, we are told that we have no money to pay for the existing transport plans in the draft budget.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Oh, you are finished.

Mr Swinney: No wonder.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order. I realise that a very exciting topic is being debated and that Christmas is approaching.

We move to closing speeches. I call Frank McAveety. We have about 10 minutes in hand, so I can put the speaking times up to around six minutes.

16:26

Mr Frank McAveety (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab): That is a noble ambition, Presiding Officer.

First, I join other members in saying that the former convener of the Finance Committee has played a highly positive role in bringing to account not just Government ministers, but a number of Government agencies on how best to spend our money in Scotland and on how they have sought to do that. I sympathise with the committee's clerks in that after a period of Des McNulty, they now face a period of Wendy Alexander—I do not know what they have done to deserve that. I have worked with both colleagues at different levels, so I can testify to their rigour and tenacity and to their occasional obsessiveness when it comes to figures, which is not a bad quality for the convener of the Finance Committee to have. The committee will enjoy the journey over the few months leading up to the May election and—we hope—beyond that.

I am sure that members of all parties would agree with what Wendy Alexander said about the level of budget that we have to spend, especially the many of us who cut our political teeth on the debate about home rule in Scotland in the 1970s and the 1980s. Regardless of where people stand on how we should govern this country, compared with that difficult period, we now have a level of resources—£25 billion—in respect of which we can use our imagination, intellectual wit and desire in order to ensure that it is spent effectively. Although I, with my colleague Gordon Jackson, sometimes find my eyes wandering across to Arthur's Seat during finance debates, we have the capacity to assess whether that £25 billion is used in a way that can genuinely make a difference throughout Scotland.

As many members have said—we have had shared discussions on the subject—a key theme that the committee's report focuses on is how we track cross-cutting priorities and how we identify whether resources follow them. What is more important, especially for many of us who have had experience in local government, is the debate about how to ensure that the needs of the cross-cutting themes are met by maximising expenditure in the big-spend areas rather than by providing them with a single budget allocation. The truth is that that is an extremely difficult and complex process. Individuals must be personally committed to it and must have the evidence base to rigorously track what happens. I hope that the committee's report at least signals ways in which

we can do that much more effectively, in relation not only to the Executive, but to the many public agencies that we must deal with.

A second benefit is that that should help Government ministers. Any Government minister must feel frustrated by the recognition that, in order to deliver for the area on which they have been asked to play a role—which, in many cases, they have a passion for—they require the support of other portfolios. It is difficult to get the system to respond in the timeframes that ministers are given. When I have been a Government minister, I have had interesting timeframes. It strikes me that we have a genuine chance of finding ways to break down that barrier more effectively. The Finance Committee's recommendations are helpful in that regard.

The second big issue is to do with allocation of grant-aided expenditure and how we best direct that resource to the areas, communities and individuals that most require it, as those of us who have a progressive philosophy want to do. Parliament has toiled with but has not resolved that problem, although we have tried to address areas of concern. Until we have addressed the issue comprehensively, we will continue to have debates such as this, in which we consider Finance Committee reports. There is no single answer to the problem, but the Finance Committee's successor committee in the next session of Parliament would benefit from a legacy in that regard. A great mission for Parliament during its next two sessions would be to address the issue much more comprehensively, because doing so would not only benefit many of my constituents, who live in one of the most disadvantaged parts of the United Kingdom, it would also make good sense ethically and economically.

Parliament cannot address the issue unless analysis is done, inputs and outputs tracked and outcomes identified. I do not want to sound like Jim Mather—I say with due respect to Jim that I probably have greater ambitions than he does on the matter—but we cannot argue for redistribution of GAE without knowing what our starting point is. Our lack of exact knowledge in that regard is a concern.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You have one minute left.

Mr McAveety: In the final minute that the Presiding Officer has generously given me, I will comment on Andrew Welsh's speech. I do not know where Andrew Welsh has been during the past week, but his comment that

"Under an SNP Government, local authorities will be properly funded"

was astonishing. That is as credible a statement

as the many claims of, "Trust me, darling—I'll only take one drink and I'll be home by 10 o'clock" that will be made at festive parties during the next three or four days. Andrew Welsh's position is not credible, because the reality is that choices will have to be made.

Mr Welsh: Will the member give way?

Mr McAveety: I will let the member in as long as he does not ask me to trust him again.

Mr Welsh: The proof of the pudding is in the eating. I was the first provost of the first SNP administration at Angus Council, which has always had the lowest council tax and the highest quality in economy, efficiency and effectiveness of services. That is what we call good management and it is what I want for the whole country.

Mr McAveety: I do not doubt—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Your time is up, Mr McAveety.

Mr McAveety: Oh. Andrew Welsh gets to finish my speech. That is parliamentary democracy.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You gave up your time to Mr Welsh, which was very seasonal of you. I call David Davidson, who may have six minutes, but no more.

16:33

Mr David Davidson (North East Scotland) (Con): I note that during the debate, ministers moved rather far apart from each other. Now the Minister for Finance and Public Service Reform has deserted the ship.

Mr McAveety: Will the member give way? I have a speech to finish—[*Laughter.*]

Mr Davidson: I will give way later. Mr McAveety can work on his speech.

Members on the Conservative benches welcome the Finance Committee's report and share many of the committee's concerns, particularly about transparency and openness. Wendy Alexander started her speech well—that is her style—and captured the issues and challenges that the committee addressed. She divided her speech into three parts: budget priorities, targets and draw-down.

No one is arguing about what the budget priorities are supposed to be but, as Wendy Alexander made clear, we do not have the evidence base that we require. We need to consider inputs, outputs and outcomes. Mark Ballard was also right to make that point. More than half the speakers in the debate concentrated on GAE and local government spending. Too many local authorities find, when they try to send a

message to Government about the pressures they are under, that they seem to be ignored.

Many members talked about social work budgets. This week, Aberdeen City Council told me that it has what amounts almost to an inbuilt imbalance of £22 million in social work. Parliament is considering legislative proposals on social justice and management of offenders in the community that will put incredible pressure on local authorities, but such pressure does not seem to have been recognised in the GAE settlement.

Wendy Alexander's comments on draw-down reminded me that there is a £1.5 billion reserve. Some cheap people might call that a war chest, but it is interesting that the minister is to draw down half of it. John Swinney asked the minister to tell us what that is for, but we did not get an answer. Now that we have no ministers in the chamber, I wonder whether we will get an answer.

Tom McCabe began by saying that he found the report useful. I wonder whether that means he accepts all its proposals and will act on them. As almost every other member seems to have quoted the Auditor General, I will throw in another quote. He said:

"there is a need for improvements in the way potential efficiencies are being set up and measured. Until this happens it will not be possible to validate completely the Executive's reported savings".

The minister ought to be reminded of comments by two of his colleagues. Margaret Curran said clearly in November 2005:

"A principle of good governance is that it should be as open and transparent as possible".—[*Official Report*, 2 November 2005; c 20191.]

In 2003, the First Minister said in the Labour Party manifesto:

"As First Minister of Scotland I guarantee to ... Be open and transparent in government".

However, as many members have said, we have not seen the Howat report.

Members have raised a series of issues, but they come down to the robustness of targets and the replacement of targets without any apparent logic, although no doubt some minister will try to correct that for us.

Andrew Welsh concentrated on social work and I have highlighted a couple of issues that will lead to even deeper problems with social work. I do not know whether, in the spending review in 2007, the ministers will tell us how the issues that arise from just one bill that is proceeding through Parliament will be funded and where the bodies will come from to deal with them.

When I was a member of the Finance Committee in the first session of Parliament, we

asked about tracing and accounting for cross-cutting spending, what happens, who does what and what we get for that spending. After all these years, the committee is still asking the same questions. I do not argue that the process is not more open now than it was in the first session of Parliament. Improvements have been made and the Executive acknowledges that more improvements need to be made, but it should be making greater strides toward providing the committees and Parliament with information about where it is going, what it is going to do and how we will have a good and transparent system.

There are a lot of anoraks in Parliament—they are in every committee—but that is part of our job. The committees and Parliament are about scrutiny. However, we must have adequate information to ensure that the right questions are asked of the right people and that the right answers are given. I congratulate the committee on its report.

16:38

Jim Mather (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): The debate has proved that opinion on the big debate on the financing of Scotland is still polarised. However, it has also shown that the arguments are accumulating in favour of Scotland gaining financial powers. Tom McCabe started with his usual assertions, but he will realise that we still have major concerns about how Scotland raises, or does not raise, its revenues and about the operation of Scottish Water, the efficient government programme, the Howat review and general accountability.

Gordon Jackson made an interesting speech. He made Edwin Morgan's dreary mantra, "It wisnae me", sound almost respectable. I was interested in his chicken-and-egg approach to whether improved health gives a strong economy or a strong economy gives better health. I look forward to engaging in that debate in the future.

Mark Ballard said that the rhetoric on the cross-cutting themes is impossible to reconcile with spending and that there is a distinct lack of evidence-based policy. I must agree. Frank McAveety struggled with the link between spending and outcomes that are good for the people of Scotland, and Derek Brownlee spoke effectively about Executive targets and exposed the weaknesses of the process. I echo his focus on value for money.

Jeremy Purvis, one of the Finance Committee's old boys, called for a genuine debate. I wonder how he voted on 2 November, when the SNP had a motion to that effect.

Jeremy Purvis: I did not vote for a motion that was lodged by a party that had already made its

mind up, before the debate started, that it wanted independence.

Jim Mather: Noted. The member's response does him as much credit as his vote did on the day.

Andrew Welsh exposed the criticality of the efficient government savings and the dangers that would arise if those savings were not forthcoming. Generously, he offered to export the management techniques of Angus Council across Scotland. I am sure that lots of people will be queuing up to take him up on that offer.

John Swinney highlighted the polite, pointed and effective judgment of Audit Scotland regarding the inadequacies of the efficient government initiative, particularly with regard to its accounting, and he sought clarity about the use of public resources from the Treasury and in connection with the Howat report.

We heard Wendy Alexander's suggestions about the 2007 spending review. I am sure that Mr Swinney will have taken note of that for future reference. In relation to what she said, we need to have more tangible goals and better measures. Although Wendy Alexander is excited about what she calls progress, I am somewhat less excited, although there are one or two glimmers of hope. The Finance Committee had an interesting exchange with Rob Wishart, during which he said that he expected that the new statistics board will pick up on the need to focus on a tighter range of key statistics. I would welcome that.

There is a need for unifying goals that can pull us together, such as maximising the number of working-age people who are in work across Scotland. That would have a positive impact and would answer some of Gordon Jackson's questions about health, life expectancy, population numbers, motivating people and even crime. It would certainly have an impact on economic growth, which we would welcome.

The committee also heard some positive words from Professor Midwinter, who agrees that we should have a smaller number of strategic goals that should be worked on progressively over time under tight statistical scrutiny and control.

However, it is not all good news. We have a continuing pattern with Scottish Water: more and more money is being released back to the Executive from Scottish Water, which essentially proves the Cuthberts' assertions time after time. I have made some interesting requests under the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002, which I will talk about in detail some other time. However, I am still awaiting an answer from the minister. Perhaps the Deputy Minister for Finance, Public Service Reform and Parliamentary Business can tell me exactly how much capital has

been released by Scottish Water to the Executive for other projects since 2002-03. I ask about that with specific regard to Dumfries.

The other major cause for concern is the Howat report. I am shocked at the situation that we find ourselves in because the validity of those data is evaporating minute by minute. I have known Bill Howat for many years—we were at school together in the early 1960s, I knew him when he was chief executive officer of Western Isles Council and I even met him when we were at an event about trust in politics that was held by the chair of ethics at Glasgow Caledonian University. At that event, I impressed on Bill Howat the fact that his report could have a major impact, that I had reservations about the weakness of the efficient government initiative, that Scotland was changing and that he should make his report as strong as he could, given that we were on the cusp of a new beginning. I regret to say that I might have tipped the man over the edge and he might have done exactly what I suggested, which might be exactly why we have still not seen that report. The sooner we have that report and it is put to work for the benefit of Scotland, the better. The longer it lies in the locker, the longer the galvanised badge of shame that this Government wears for trying to run Scotland on a purely expenditure-only basis will glint and shine.

16:44

The Deputy Minister for Finance, Public Service Reform and Parliamentary Business (George Lyon): Despite the fact that some would say that this was a dry and dusty subject, I think that there have been some excellent speeches. At the end of the day, the budget of the Executive underpins many of the improvements that people have seen in the condition and management of Scotland's public services since 1999 because of the priorities that we have set.

Wendy Alexander highlighted the three issues that concern the Finance Committee. She said that the committee seeks a clear statement on how individual departments contribute to the cross-cutting themes. We have made progress on that, although I accept that more progress could be made to provide further clarification. I am sure that the matter will be considered closely in the next round of the budget process.

Wendy Alexander made an important point about GAE. She said that, as there is significant divergence in, for example, children's services, we should consider making adjustments to reflect the reality of current spend rather than historical spend. That is an important point. She also said that we should be more specific on the draw-down of end-year flexibility resources. I can confirm that

some of those resources were indeed used for the local government settlement.

I am glad that Mr Swinney acknowledged that we are making good progress with the efficient government initiative and welcomed the extra finance for local government, although I am not sure how that squares with his commitment to cap council tax increases in the next couple of years. Academics have now rubbished that and said that it would be virtually impossible to do. On the point about baselines in the efficient government initiative, I point out that the Auditor General confirmed that there are established baselines for 86 per cent of the efficiencies that he examined. It is clear that there is further to go, but the vast majority of efficiencies have proper baselines that enable us to measure the progress that is made.

Mr Swinney: I do not know whether the minister heard the evidence that the Auditor General gave the Audit Committee on Tuesday, but the Auditor General gave the clear impression that he expected the Government to make more progress in assuring parliamentary committees and the wider public that the efficient government process is robust. Has the Government reflected on the Auditor General's evidence and the report that he published on Tuesday? It requires a systemic change in the structure of the efficient government process.

George Lyon: The Government seeks to improve the process at all times, but I welcome the Auditor General's report, which states:

"Our review has found a wide body of evidence to suggest that the initiative is progressing and that it is delivering efficiencies that would not otherwise have been achieved."

The Auditor General recognises that we have made significant progress and that we are delivering substantial efficiencies that would not have been made without the process.

Mr Swinney: What about the criticisms?

George Lyon: We accept that there are criticisms in the report and we are committed to improving the process as time goes on.

The Howat report was mentioned a couple of times in the debate. I am pleased to state once again that the Executive intends to publish the Howat report when the spending review process has been completed. Of course, it is not binding on any future Administration.

Mr Brownlee was right to say that the key point is the need for value for money from the budget and the budget process. The budget is only a means to an end. It reflects the Government's priorities and states what the money will be spent on. The public will judge what we do with the money on the facts. We have built 200 new

schools and employed thousands of extra teachers. There has been a big increase in the quality and quantity of public transport, which is being used by record numbers of people. We have built a substantial number of new hospitals and we have extra doctors, nurses and allied health professionals. We have the lowest waiting times that Scotland has ever had. We have extra police on our streets and there has been an overall drop in crime. In the past seven years, we have made record investment from the centre in local government.

People must consider those facts when they judge whether the budget is delivering. I believe that, in May, the people of Scotland will recognise that the budget has delivered significant progress and that there has been a big improvement in public services since the Administration came to power.

Andrew Welsh accused the Minister for Finance and Public Service Reform of talking nonsense, but the only nonsense in the debate was talked by SNP members. What is their position on tax rises? Is it Angus Robertson's position or Alex Salmond's position? What is their position on the £11 billion black hole? They are unsure whether to rubbish the numbers because, if they do, the next instant they are using the same numbers to try to talk their way out of the mess. How do they plan to fulfil their commitments to billions of pounds of extra spending, as my colleague Jeremy Purvis outlined in his speech? How are they going to cap council tax levels, given the views of the professors who have been quoted? I suggest that the only nonsense that has been talked in today's debate has been from our colleagues in the SNP. Those hard questions are certainly not going to go away over the coming months.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Finally, I call Dr Elaine Murray to wind up for the Finance Committee. [*Interruption.*] Order.

16:50

Dr Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab): I do not intend to shout over Mr Swinney, particularly given that I have done him the favour of taking over his slot in summing up for the committee—on this occasion it is not because I was late. However, I do not mind, as it gives me the opportunity to be the last member to speak in a debate in the chamber in 2006. As my family can confirm, I enjoy getting the last word.

Mr McAveety: And we will see her here next year.

Dr Murray: Indeed.

The debate has been an opportunity for many members to trot around the chamber,

metaphorically speaking, on various hobby-horses. We heard speeches about efficient government, the Howat review, local government finance and the importance of health spending in Gordon Jackson's constituency. All those topics are of importance and interest.

However, in summing up for the committee, I will return to the subject of its stage 2 report on the budget process. In its report, the committee recognises that significant progress has been made with the budget process over the past four years. Indeed, the Executive has taken into account many of the suggestions that the Finance Committee made in previous years. We should recognise the way in which the Executive and the Finance Committee have been able to work together on the process. Ministers themselves may feel that the Finance Committee can sometimes be a rather aggressive forum. However, we have managed to work together and we have seen progress with the budget process.

As other members have said, this was a relatively light year, as the UK spending review was put back a year to 2007. As a consequence, the Executive's spending review will also take place in 2007. Given the considerable burden of legislation that the Parliament has had to deal with this year, I for one am quite pleased that the spending review was put back a year, as that will give us a little more time to consider it. In some ways, the timing presents some difficulties—there is an event of some significance in May next year, which may create a certain hiatus in our concentration on the spending review.

Mark Ballard, Frank McAveety and others voiced concerns over the presentation of cross-cutting issues and how they are being supported by the various departmental portfolios. That is a difficult matter. I do not think that they are not being presented because the Executive does not want to present them, but it is difficult to drill down into the various departmental budget lines to identify how those issues are being dealt with.

The Finance Committee has a number of suggestions to make for SR 2007. For example, we suggest that there should be a clear statement of overall priorities and we want to see a definition of the spending programmes that contribute towards them. We must recognise that some budget lines will of course contribute towards more than one priority. We would also like to see an explanation of how priorities are reflected in portfolio budget lines, although we recognise that some departments—we single out the communities portfolio—are already doing that job fairly well.

As Wendy Alexander and Derek Brownlee mentioned, we highlight the need for the publication of spending review reports on the

cross-cutting priorities. Furthermore, we would like completion of the reports on the SR 2002 targets that were replaced in SR 2004. We cannot measure whether they were achieved unless we get the final reports, so it would be useful to have them.

We would like reports following spending review 2007 to focus on the changes to proposed budgets in subsequent years, with an explanation of the major changes in the guide accompanying the budget. I know that ministers have pledged to take that on board.

Others have referred to subject committee input to the budget process, and to the level of information that committees should discuss with the relevant Executive departments. We know that the Enterprise and Culture Committee already does that. We have to consider the level of information that committees need in order to allow them to make a significant input to the budget process.

A more general issue for subject committees came up yesterday during the debate on the accountability of commissioners: the need for subject committees to receive reports from the various commissioners—especially reports on the subjects that most closely relate to the committees' responsibilities. The Finance Committee's legacy paper, to which Derek Brownlee referred, will have to take account of such issues. Committees have legislation to consider and they often have wide-ranging inquiries on issues in which they are passionately interested. It is therefore sometimes difficult for committees to fit in financial scrutiny, and indeed the scrutiny of commissioners. After the election in 2007, there will have to be discussions between the convener of the Finance Committee and the conveners of the subject committees on how such scrutiny can be built into the committees' programmes.

Subject committees will also have to look into the level of support that they require—from advisers, for example—to allow them to undertake scrutiny more effectively. Some work will have to be done on that. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): Order. I know that it is Christmas, but members should keep a little quieter please.

Dr Murray: I will keep going.

Wendy Alexander and George Lyon talked about the need to review GAE figures and local spending levels. The Education Committee was worried about spending on services for children. Obviously, work needs to be done. That work will have to involve the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and not just the Scottish Executive, because it is COSLA that determines many of the

formulae by which various councils receive their budgets.

The Finance Committee also feels that equalities information has to improve; we suggest that each department should perform a gender-disaggregated analysis of one quantitative target, and then use that analysis to inform the following spending review. Seeing the Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport in the chamber prompted me to think, for example, about general levels of physical activity and about—dare I say it at this time of year?—the need to tackle obesity. Policies may have different effects on men and women, so we need gender-disaggregated information.

Members have spoken about the known pressures. Some issues that we raised in our stage 2 report—such as the draw-down from the central unallocated provision and the pressures on local government funding—were addressed in the ministerial statement last week and in George Lyon's contribution today.

Andrew Welsh asked whether the funding would be recurrent. I think that I heard the Minister for Finance and Public Service Reform say last week that £157 million would be included in further years in the baseline. That deals with many concerns that the Finance Committee has raised in previous years and again this year.

The Finance Committee has three main requests for future years: we would like the Executive's priorities to be more obviously reflected in funding decisions; we would like a sharper focus on cross-cutting themes and the budget lines that contribute towards the Executive's objectives; and we would like there to be more direct linking of objectives, budget lines and targets.

I will end by thanking Arthur Midwinter—as Wendy Alexander did—for his contribution over the past four years. He has done a tremendous amount of work for us. I would also like to thank the clerks, committee members and committee witnesses, and all my constituents and Alex Fergusson's constituents who came to the meeting of the committee in Dumfries to inform us of their priorities and of the issues in the budget that affect them.

Finally, I wish all members a happy Christmas and a prosperous and, indeed, prudent 2007. I am convinced that that will be the happy situation in Scotland should Labour continue to lead the Executive after 3 May.

Decision Time

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): If the amendment in the name of Maureen Macmillan is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Phil Gallie—S2M-5355.2—will fall.

The first question is, that amendment S2M-5355.5, in the name of Maureen Macmillan, which seeks to amend motion S2M-5355, in the name of Nicola Sturgeon, on Trident, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 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)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 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)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 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)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Ind)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

AGAINST

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Arbuckle, Mr Andrew (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)

Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (Sol)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (Ind)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 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)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (Sol)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 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)

ABSTENTIONS

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Glen, Marilyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Gordon, Mr Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Petrie, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 43, Against 56, Abstentions 20.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S2M-5355.2, in the name of Phil Gallie, which seeks to amend motion S2M-5355, in the name of Nicola Sturgeon, on Trident, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 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)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central 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)

AGAINST

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Arbuckle, Mr Andrew (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
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 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) (Sol)
 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)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 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, Campbell (West of Scotland) (Ind)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 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)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (Sol)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 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)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 16, Against 103, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The third question is, that amendment S2M-5355.3, in the name of Jim Wallace, which seeks to amend motion S2M-5355, in the name of Nicola Sturgeon, on Trident, 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)
 Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (Sol)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (Ind)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Ind)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 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)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (Sol)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 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

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Gordon, Mr Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 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)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Petrie, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 57, Against 62, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The fourth question—*[Interruption.]* Order. The fourth question is, that motion S2M-5355, in the name of Nicola Sturgeon, on Trident, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (Sol)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (Ind)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (Sol)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (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

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Arbuckle, Mr Andrew (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)

Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Gordon, Mr Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 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)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Ind)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Petrie, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

ABSTENTIONS

McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 45, Against 72, Abstentions 2.

Motion disagreed to.

[Interruption.]

The Presiding Officer: Order.

The fifth question is, that amendment S2M-5349.4, in the name of Sylvia Jackson, which seeks to amend motion S2M-5349, in the name of John Swinney, on post offices, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gordon, Mr Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 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)
 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)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (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)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Ind)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

AGAINST

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Arbuckle, Mr Andrew (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)

Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
 Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 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)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 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)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (Ind)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Petrie, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watt, Ms Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

ABSTENTIONS

Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (Sol)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (Sol)
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 49, Against 60, Abstentions 10.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The sixth question is, that amendment S2M-5349.1, in the name of

Murdo Fraser, which seeks to amend motion S2M-5349, in the name of John Swinney, on post offices, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 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)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 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)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 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)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Ind)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Petrie, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (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

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Arbuckle, Mr Andrew (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)

Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gordon, Mr Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 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, Campbell (West of Scotland) (Ind)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

ABSTENTIONS

Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (Sol)
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (Sol)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 50, Against 63, Abstentions 6.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The seventh question is, that amendment S2M-5349.3, in the name of Euan Robson, which seeks to amend motion S2M-5349,

in the name of John Swinney, on post offices, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Arbuckle, Mr Andrew (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (Sol)
Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (Sol)
Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)
Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)

AGAINST

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
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)
Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)
Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (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, Marilyn (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)
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, Dumfries 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)
MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (Ind)
Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Ind)
Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
Petrie, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)
Watt, Ms Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

ABSTENTIONS

Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 19, Against 90, Abstentions 10.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The eighth question is, that amendment S2M-5349.2, in the name of Carolyn Leckie, which seeks to amend motion S2M-5349, in the name of John Swinney, on post offices, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (Sol)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (Ind)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (Sol)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (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

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Arbuckle, Mr Andrew (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marilyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)

Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Gordon, Mr Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 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)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 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)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Ind)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Petrie, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 41, Against 78, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The ninth question is, that motion S2M-5349, in the name of John Swinney, on post offices, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (Sol)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
 Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 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)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (Ind)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Petrie, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (Sol)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (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

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Arbuckle, Mr Andrew (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)

Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gordon, Mr Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 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)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (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)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Ind)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 56, Against 63, Abstentions 0.

Motion disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The 10th question is, that motion S2M-5311, in the name of Donald Gorrie, on the Procedures Committee's sixth, seventh, eighth and ninth reports in 2006, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament notes the Procedures Committee's 6th Report, 2006 (Session 2), *Public Bills and Substitution* (SP Paper 652), 7th Report, 2006 (Session 2), *Members' Interests (Parliamentary Determinations and Resolutions)* (SP Paper 659), 8th Report, 2006 (Session 2), *Consolidation Bill Procedure* (SP Paper 676) and 9th

Report, 2006 (Session 2), *Rule 10.3.2 (the "20-day rule")* (SP Paper 685) and agrees that the changes to Standing Orders set out in Annexe A to each of these reports be made with effect from 22 December 2006.

The Presiding Officer: The 11th question is, that motion S2M-5319, in the name of Wendy Alexander, on the Finance Committee's report on stage 2 of the 2007-08 budget process, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament notes the 9th Report, 2006 (Session 2) of the Finance Committee, *Stage 2 of the 2007-08 Budget Process* (SP Paper 695) and refers the report and its recommendations to the Scottish Executive for consideration.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time.

A happy Christmas and guid new year to you all.

Meeting closed at 17:10.

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Thursday 28 December 2006

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