

# **MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT**

Wednesday 7 February 2007

Session 2

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## Scottish Parliament

*Wednesday 7 February 2007*

[THE PRESIDING OFFICER *opened the meeting at 14:30*]

### Time for Reflection

**The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid):** Good afternoon. As is usual on Wednesdays, the first item of business is time for reflection. Our time for reflection leader today is the Right Rev Alan McDonald, the moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland.

**The Right Rev Alan McDonald (Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland):** I am glad to be standing in this place near the beginning of 2007, for, as members know, this is a significant year—it marks the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Slave Trade Act 1807, which abolished the slave trade.

Scotland has two moments in the history of slavery. The first is dark and troubling. In 1695, an African trading company was set up here in Edinburgh and sent out a slave ship to Africa. Glasgow prospered and became a wealthy city partly as a result of commerce based on slave-produced tobacco and sugar from the plantations. Many slave masters and owners in the Caribbean were Scottish. In fact, by 1817 one third of all slaves in Jamaica were owned by Scots.

However, Scotland has another moment in the history of slavery, and our second moment is a light in the darkness. Scots were crucially involved in the struggle to abolish the slave trade at home and abroad. The Rev Robert Walker of Cramond kirk—the skating minister in the famous portrait by Sir Henry Raeburn, which is a familiar, recurring image here—persuaded the presbytery of Edinburgh in February 1788 to petition for the ending of the slave trade. By 1792, 185 of the petitions calling on the British Government to end the slave trade—one third of the British total—came from Scotland, from communities as far apart as Kirkwall and Kirkcudbright.

I applaud the new, creative links that the Scottish Parliament is forging with Malawi, and the way in which in 2007 we in Scotland are learning to see the world anew, through African eyes. As a trade union leader from Malawi reminded me recently, it was David Livingstone—physician, explorer and missionary—who informed people in Britain about the impact of the slave trade on people in Africa, and who sought to fight slavery by taking the gospel, and commerce, to Africa.

I have just returned from two weeks in Ghana, in west Africa. I was invited to Ghana by the two Presbyterian churches with which the Church of Scotland has connections that stretch back more than 90 years. I also visited Christian Aid development projects in the country. As part of the visit, I was taken to the dungeons at Cape Coast where slaves were incarcerated before being shipped across the Atlantic. I will never forget standing at the little door in the dungeon wall known as the point of no return, which the slaves knew was the last sight they would ever have of Africa, as they were loaded on to the specially built slave ships.

As we prepare to mark this important anniversary, let us learn from the dark times of the past and resolve never to repeat the evils of slavery, whether through human trafficking, the international debt crisis or grinding poverty in the developing world. [*Applause.*]

## Tartan

**The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid):** The next item of business is a debate on the promotion of tartan and Scotland's tartan industry.

14:34

**The Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Allan Wilson):** I welcome the opportunity that today's debate gives us to look at one of Scotland's most iconic and readily recognisable images—tartan. The subject evokes a wide variety of differing and complex views. It can be argued either that tartan is an essential and integral part of Scottish identity and our history or that it is a product and image popularised by a sentimental and largely outdated vision of Scotland. Some see the association with tartan as a valuable link with diaspora Scots across the world or as a romantic distraction from a modern Scotland—a reminder of our bloody past and military traditions.

It can be argued either that the image of tartan belongs to Scotland's past or that tartan continues to play an important role in Scotland's economy and cultural identity. For what it is worth, my view tends towards the latter.

We can be certain of two things. One is that everyone has a view on tartan, and the other is that tartan is one of a select handful of images, products and events that are immediately and consistently recognised across the globe as quintessentially Scottish. That gives us and our tartan industry, if I can call it that, an important opportunity to secure niche markets and maximise the potential of the brand.

The traditional and cultural values that are associated with tartan give it great potential in world markets. It appeals to particular overseas tourism markets in, for example, the United States, Canada and Australia. Capitalising on and developing interest in tartan can support the marketing of Scotland more generally, particularly in the strong niche market of ancestral tourism, but also through more recent promotional developments, such as tartan week in the United States, in which a number of members have participated.

Tartan as a trademark of Scotland is recognised everywhere. I am keen that we work to strengthen that brand and exercise some control here in Scotland as the guardians of the authentic article. That can only be of benefit to Scottish businesses. By promoting tartan and Scotland's tartan industry, we are standing up for Scottish businesses and working to promote and grow our textiles sector. For example, we aim to grow our textiles industry by using tartan in innovative ways, such as in the

design industry as a key component of a modern, successful textiles sector.

If we accept the obvious potential benefits of tartan, we can start to think of ways to maximise the economic, marketing and promotional opportunities of tartan and the tartan industry in a modern, dynamic, competitive and outward-looking Scotland. The two are not mutually—

**Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP):** How does the minister intend to build consensus around the objective that he just outlined—which I support fully—to ensure that some practical action comes out of his helpful remarks?

**Allan Wilson:** I will explain the initial steps by which we will seek to secure the consensus that John Swinney and I, and probably the whole chamber, wish to see. I tend to the view that if we in this Parliament do not stand up for and associate ourselves with the tartan brand, no one else is likely to do it as effectively. The most effective way of promoting tartan is to build the consensus that the member seeks. I will speak about that later.

In that context, I make particular mention of Jamie McGrigor's work and his member's bill, which proposes a national register of tartan. I know that Mr McGrigor has for several years engaged with key figures in the tartan industry to discuss a possible definitive, publicly run and maintained register of tartans. I know that those discussions have been lengthy and challenging. I am grateful to Jamie McGrigor for brokering a consensus on the need for a definitive register. If there is not a unanimous industry view on how best to achieve that—which was John Swinney's point—it is our objective to secure it.

Like Jamie McGrigor, I support fully the concept of working to promote and support the tartan industry in Scotland. In our response to his bill, the Scottish ministers recognised that the principle underlying the bill—of having a definitive, independent, authoritative and accessible register of tartans in Scotland—could have a beneficial economic effect, become a focus for and raise the profile of Scottish-based businesses with an interest in tartan, and help to promote Scotland more generally.

The existing registers are incomplete and are, in fact, dominated by sectoral interests, such as the weavers and the genealogy tourism sector. Members can correct me if I am wrong, but the proposal for a national register has pretty well united those previously disparate interests on the need for a register, if not on the detail of the form it should take.

At the moment, the design and production of tartan are wholly unregulated. While that situation would continue, introducing a national register in

Scotland could boost interest in the Scottish tartan industry and bolster perceptions of authenticity and quality assurance with regard to Scottish-registered, designed and produced tartans. Indeed, the register could become a marketing tool to give Scottish businesses a distinct competitive edge over their competitors.

As a result, I propose to ask Scottish Enterprise's textiles team to assess the relative importance of the tartan industry in Scotland and to consider whether introducing a register will immediately benefit Scotland's tartan industry and help to promote the image of Scotland more generally.

**Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD):** I might have misheard the minister, but I believe that he said that the situation with tartan is wholly unregulated. However, the Scottish Tartans Authority has put a considerable amount of resources into establishing authenticity, and its work should be recognised. Indeed, does that not assure customers that there is a degree of industry regulation?

**Allan Wilson:** The member is correct. It has been suggested that there is little time for this debate, but it seems to have stimulated the kind of discussion that I hoped it would. By national register, I mean that, as John Swinney said, we should use the various existing registers to compile one authentic national register of the textile in Scotland.

The outcomes of the work that we propose to undertake will inform a more balanced and informed consideration of whether the main principles of Mr McGrigor's bill would be best taken forward by working with existing public and private sector bodies, by exploring non-legislative options that may be open to us or by taking a legislative approach. I am grateful to Mr McGrigor for bringing his proposals this far. It is clear that the Scottish ministers are willing to listen to and take on good ideas from whatever source and irrespective of whether we share the member's political perspective.

Further consideration of the proposal for a Scottish register of tartan is merited, and I propose to take that work forward by carrying out an economic impact assessment of the importance of the tartan industry in Scotland and by considering the potential economic and promotional advantages of introducing a national register. Moreover, I suggest that the Scottish textiles team and my officials engage with key players in the tartan industry on possible legislative and non-legislative options and on the way forward for a national register of tartan in Scotland.

14:43

**Jim Mather (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):** I give the warmest possible welcome to the minister's words and, indeed, welcome this opportunity to reinforce tartan's iconic importance.

Scotland, of course, wants to be seen as a modern advanced country with a modern image. However, when Professor Michael Porter, the world expert on competitiveness, came here in 2000, he implored us not to throw the baby out with the bath water. To visitors to our country, the likes of tartan are synonymous with Scotland and they expect to see it when they come here in profusion. As a result, I welcome the minister's view that we should take ownership of the tartan brand and its inheritance. I look forward to hearing what his textiles team has to say on the subject, and feel that his promise to bring the various elements together holds out great hope.

After all, tartan is even now earning its keep and rewarding our nation. According to Professor Porter, we are one of the 15 or 16 countries on the planet that truly has a vivid national brand. Furthermore, Scotland means something to 98 per cent of the world's population. As Professor Porter has made clear, that appreciation of who we are and the values that we hold is a function not so much of our stem cell research and financial services sector as of golf, whisky and tartan. That is simply a fact of life, and we should play to those strengths.

**Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind):** With reference to the learned professor's claim that 98 per cent of the world's population has some idea of what Scotland means, do we have any notion of how the survey was carried out? I ask him to name two people in China who can tell us.

**Jim Mather:** Professor Michael Porter's reputation suggests that a somewhat more systematic approach would have been taken. Certainly, his work has passed muster—I believe that Scotland the Brand paid a substantial fee for it—and goes well beyond two people from China.

What is interesting about tartan is the way in which it helps us to gain traction in terms of others' awareness of Scotland. Over the past 10 years, 50 per cent more Americans have designated themselves as Scots-Americans. Although that is doubtless a function of the Scottish Parliament and Braveheart, it is also a function of the tartan day phenomenon. Our cousins in America are developing rituals such as the kirkin' o' the tartan, through which tartan and plaid are being placed at the heart of their personae as Scots-Americans.

Last week, we gained further insight into that at Tom Hunter's excellent event entitled "The Second Enlightenment" at Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum. He brought along Simon Anholt, a young

man who is the world's leading authority on national brands and whose advice contained some important messages about our stewardship of tartan in the long term. Simon Anholt talked about national image being psychologically and economically important to any country. He said that, as with tartan, a country's national image has to be managed and maintained, and that Scotland could not simply freewheel on its reputation, products and tartans that were delivered by previous generations. He went on to say that the way to maintain and develop our international reputations and brands is to gain a clear idea of our values and identity and of the values that we want to project, for example through modern tartan. It is clear that the iconic appeal of tartan lends itself to that.

Simon Anholt also made the important point that the only way in which to build that future identity and reputation is to have a pipeline of new and exciting projects and innovations that are totally consistent with what has gone on in the past. We know that our textile industries and designers are up for that. He was adamant in saying that neither new and boring nor old and interesting would do. He was equally adamant in saying that what was required was new and interesting, although that did not mean throwing out the baby with the bath water—we have to continue what we have got.

The minister's proposition will get support, along with any other sensible efforts to bolster tartan and promote the image, values and attributes of Scotland. It is clear that tartan is an identifiable icon that embodies the values of the nation. My wish is that it continues to be so over the long term.

Recently, I have been reading a book with the somewhat off-putting title "Great Boss Dead Boss"—

**Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD):** Alex Salmond. [*Laughter.*]

**Jim Mather:** If we are going to talk about the living dead, it might be Prime Minister's question time that features, Mr Stone.

The book is all about the efficacy of tribes and the necessity for them, as successful and cohesive entities, to have iconic images, perhaps even down to apparel. Mr Gibson and I apologise for not wearing the kilt today. We will remedy that after 3 May.

14:48

**Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** I congratulate Allan Wilson, the Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning, on securing the debate.

I listened carefully to what the minister said. Despite my delight that ministers have taken such an interest in my Scottish Register of Tartans Bill of late, I want some assurances that they will take forward the general principles of the bill, with which they say they agree, before I withdraw it. My bill is important: a national register of tartan would establish a publicly owned and managed register that would enable current and historical records to be recorded and preserved.

Three years ago, I was approached by a steering group that had been meeting for two years with the request to facilitate the introduction of a bill. The steering group consisted of representatives of each of the existing registers, the Lord Lyon and others from the world of tartan. By the time I joined their discussions, they had sought, but not found, a non-legislative solution. I introduced the bill because of the underlying and overarching desire to secure the status of an independent and authoritative register for Scotland. At the time, there were also considerable rumours that, if Scotland did not produce such a register, another country—for example, Canada—might steal the lead.

Tartan's roots are in Scotland, but its branches spread worldwide. Scotland is the Mecca for tartan, and it would be stupid for our country to lose that valuable status. Other countries would give their eye teeth for such a recognisable symbol of identity. Anyone who sees tartan anywhere in the world thinks about Scotland—and bagpipers, pipe bands, the historic Scottish regiments, the rugby supporters, the tartan army of football supporters, the Edinburgh tattoo, the kilt shops, tartan day in New York and numerous Highland games worldwide. Tartan inspires pride in Scotland's past and present.

Tartan has been around for a long time and does not belong to a private section of the population. It does not belong to the weavers or to another section of the industry; it belongs to Scotland. That is why it is important to have a Scottish register of tartans. It is vital that such a register should be independent and publicly managed. That was the conclusion of the steering group with which I was involved, which is why the legislative route was required. A public register would not just secure important information for our nation but make that information accessible to the Scottish diaspora. The 30 million or so members of the diaspora will be pleased that the new Scottish Parliament is elevating such a beloved national icon.

The proposal for a national register received strong support from many sources. Dr Andrew Cubie wrote in his submission on the Scottish Register of Tartans Bill to the Enterprise and Culture Committee:



"I believe that an official register of tartan would greatly benefit not only the limited number of commercial weavers who call themselves the 'tartan industry', but also the entire Scottish tourist industry and tourist related activities, including genealogy."

VisitScotland said that tartan is Scotland's trademark and went on to say:

"tartan conjures immediate associations with the scenery, our culture and heritage".

Tartan adds value to the tourism industry.

Shortly after I introduced the bill, I went to the excellent, revamped Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum. Attached to the interesting tartan display in the museum are the words:

"When you see tartan, you immediately think of Scotland. It's a powerful symbol for the Scots—so powerful that Government"—

a Whig Government—

"once banned people from wearing tartan. Tartan is now a huge success story. It graces the catwalks of London and Paris, finding its way into the hearts (and the carrier bags) of most visitors to Scotland."

That nicely states in a nutshell the importance of tartan.

I am grateful to Allan Wilson for his kind remarks and I will search his opening and winding-up speeches for an assurance that both parties in the Executive will take action to create a national tartan register if they are returned to Government. His remarks so far have been encouraging. I will help in any way that I can, as I am sure will the people whom he intends to consult, who submitted evidence on the proposal at an early stage. I am grateful for their work and encouragement. I also thank David Cullum, Rodger Evans and Alison Wilson from the non-Executive bills unit for their invaluable guidance and assistance, and I thank my assistant, Joanna Mowat.

If the Executive were to take forward the general principles of my bill, it would be churlish of me to demand more parliamentary time from an already overburdened schedule. Therefore, I will consider withdrawing my bill, but I reserve the right to bring it back if I am re-elected and the Executive does not fulfil its promise.

14:53

**Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD):** I congratulate Jamie McGrigor on introducing the Scottish Register of Tartans Bill. I also congratulate members on their speeches, including Jim Mather. I agree entirely with what has been said.

I will consider three important historical events, with which many members will be familiar. The first is the crucial decision in 1745 by Charles Edward Stuart—Bonnie Prince Charlie—to give

the order that his soldiers be dressed in tartan, particularly for the battle of Culloden. Whether the tartan followed any clan identity is very much open to debate; soldiers recognised friend and foe from what they wore in their bonnets. However, the order was a big event, because it put tartan on the map in the context of the national consciousness. It could be argued that until that event tartan was solely the property of the Highlands and was worn just by warring tribesmen and sheep and cattle stealers.

As we know, in 1746 and 1747 tartan was proscribed. Jamie McGrigor referred to that and, in all fairness to him, I should say that I cannot remember whether a Tory or a Whig Administration was responsible.

**Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** I wonder whether the member would like to take this opportunity to apologise on behalf of the Whig Government of the time for the act of proscription 1747.

**Mr Stone:** That is tempting.

Tartan was proscribed north of the Highland line. If a person wore a greatcoat or jacket of tartan, they were subject either to six months' imprisonment or to exile or banishment to foreign shores for seven years. That was a draconian rule, to say the least.

The legislation was repealed about 30 years later, by which time tartan had become slightly more fashionable. It had never quite lost its identity, because the Highland regiments wore it, particularly the Government tartan, which was worn by the independent companies of the Black Watch. That tartan was developed into other military tartans by the addition of a coloured line into the set. It is worth remembering that the acts of 1746 and 1747 did not ban the gentry from wearing tartan. In the latter part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Highland Society of London and the Northern Meeting Society were formed, and sought to encourage the innocent recreation and amusement of the gentry and nobility, who still wore tartan.

As we all know, the second crucial event in the history of tartan was Sir Walter Scott's friendship with King William IV. He had known him as Prince Regent and dined with him after he wrote the Waverley novels.

**Jeremy Purvis:** It was George IV.

**Mr Stone:** That is absolutely correct. I stand corrected—I meant George IV.

Sir Walter Scott persuaded George IV to come north to Edinburgh in 1822. It is well known that the monarch wore pink tights under his kilt and was a generally splendid sight. However, when

Wilkie painted his portrait, the tights were not put in.

For the visit, there was a lot of jockeying for position among the Highland lads, particularly MacDonell of Glengarry. Like peacocks, they were determined to show their ascendancy and they argued about what the etiquette would be when the monarch came to Edinburgh. That is why Walter Scott wrote instructions, in an anonymous pamphlet, on how they were to conduct themselves. He wrote that there was to be a grand highland ball, for which the rule was that people had to wear either military dress or highland dress. There was mad scrabbling among lowland lads to trace any whiff whatever of highland ancestry and the Edinburgh tailors did a fast business in kilts. That was another event that brought tartan and kilts into the national consciousness.

As a slight aside, although this is nothing to do with tartan, it is worth noting that the man who won the catering contract for George IV's visit was one Ebenezer Lennox Scroggie, whose grave in the Canongate kirkyard states that he was a "meal man", because he was a corn dealer and vintner. When Charles Dickens came to Edinburgh later in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, he went to the kirkyard and misread the gravestone as saying "mean man", so Ebenezer Lennox Scroggie was the origin of Ebenezer Scrooge, which is not commonly known, although I am sure that Jamie McGrigor knew that.

The third and final crucial event on which I want to touch was the involvement of Prince Albert and Queen Victoria in all things tartan.

I know that I have digressed, Presiding Officer, but through those three interesting historical events, the idea of tartan as part of Scotland's identity was brought to the fore and it has remained with us ever since. There is a lot of sense in what Jamie McGrigor says, so I welcome the minister's statement. Tartan is synonymous with the Highlands and Scotland—it is wrapped up in our country, which we love so well. We should take a long, hard and encouraging look at Jamie McGrigor's bill.

**The Presiding Officer:** We come to the open debate. If we do not have too many digressions, every member who wants to speak will be able to do so.

14:59

**Mr Kenneth Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab):** I am pleased to speak in the debate. I inform members of my interest in Scotland's tartan industry: my wife's family has been involved in kilt making for six generations. Kinloch Anderson, the family business, has been supportive of Jamie McGrigor's Scottish Register of Tartan Bill and of efforts generally to establish a national register of

tartans. Although neither I nor my wife, Claire, has a direct connection with the business and certainly no commercial or financial links with it whatever, I have a strong personal link with family members who have spent their lifetimes in the industry, as did those in several preceding generations.

Undoubtedly, that perspective and insight have informed my thinking on tartan in Scotland. I am well aware that the reaction of many in Scotland to tartan is to cringe rather than celebrate, but the Harry Lauder, Nessie-in-a-kilt tartan souvenir industry is only one part of the business. Tartan does not have to be stuck in the past, and it certainly does not have to be downmarket, cheap or nasty. Whether through Jamie McGrigor's bill or through action from the Executive, we can secure the status and the future of tartan.

The decline of Scotland's textiles industry over the past two or three decades has been alarming. I suspect that that sobering economic reality has brought opposing sides of the tartan industry together, to a point at which they can now agree a position. The industry has reached an agreement on the promotion of a national register. Existing registers are in private hands, but the new register will not be commercially or privately controlled. Any private register is vulnerable to being used to further the interests of one group or another. The new register will be simple, public and non-compulsory.

Viewing the register from the perspective of the Scottish Parliament, I feel that it will offer at least limited protection to one of our country's cultural assets. We protect our natural heritage, we protect our built heritage and we are proud of our Highland history, so why do we not protect tartan?

**John Swinburne (Central Scotland) (SSCUP):** Does the member agree that, unless protection is built into the Scottish Register of Tartans Bill such that the only tartan that matters is that produced in Scotland, tartan will go into cyberspace and then out to China and the sweatshops of the far east, where it will be produced in great quantities to the register's specifications? Tartan must be Scottish.

**Mr Macintosh:** I admire John Swinburne's hopes, but unfortunately I do not think that what he suggests will be possible. We have to take an inclusive approach to tartan. I do not think that tartan is actually owned by anyone, but a Scottish register will ensure that everyone knows that Scotland has a claim to it. The register will provide gradations, or ranks, of tartan through which we can promote Scottish business. We can achieve some of John Swinburne's aims, but we cannot operate judgmentally.

My father is the last in a long line of native Gaelic speakers and I am proud that the Parliament has done so much to secure Gaelic—

in fact, to save it. Like my father-in-law, who is the fifth in the line of the generations of kilt makers in my family, I wonder why we cannot do the same for tartan. Why can we not protect this iconic cultural asset?

A tartan register will do more than preserve tartan's place in our history and culture. Tartan appeals to our romantic side, but we can do more for it by consolidating and building on traditional tartan businesses.

I do not want to portray the tartan industry or Kinloch Anderson in particular as just kilt makers. Many in the industry have diversified and are looking to the future. They are designing tartans for modern tastes and are moving into new markets. They are building businesses and an industry that we can be proud of.

Taking tartan into public control—which is what I believe we are doing—could have indirect benefits for businesses and the economy. At the moment, any Tom, Dick or Harry can design a tartan, but making the brand more Scottish will benefit Scottish businesses. If the Scottish Parliament does not do that, there is little likelihood of a United Kingdom Parliament standing up for Scottish businesses that may be up against other UK companies.

**Jeremy Purvis:** I appreciate the member's arguments, but can he appreciate that part of the success of the modern tartan industry has been the lack of bureaucracy? We have a vibrant private sector in which people are designing new tartans and using them in new ways. A nationalised approach may not be the best way of securing the future of tartan.

**Mr Macintosh:** I appreciate Mr Purvis's concerns, just as I appreciated Mr Swinburne's concerns. However, I do not think that the register will take a judgmental approach and discriminate against one tartan or another. The register will be inclusive. It will help all tartans. Nobody will be turned away from it, so no sector will dominate and nobody will be excluded. The tartan register and the accompanying archive will generate further interest in tartan.

Tartan is a trademark of Scotland and it is recognised everywhere. In the far east, it already carries with it traditional and cultural values that make it a big seller, with associated benefits for all Scottish businesses. Do we really want others to cheapen the brand, or do we want to be in a position from which we can exercise some, albeit limited, protection?

Whether through Jamie McGrigor's bill or Executive action, we can be in a position to give tartan a real boost in Scotland. Tartan can remind us of who we are, who we were and where we

came from. More important, it can be a symbol of where we are going.

15:05

**Mr Kenny MacAskill (Lothians) (SNP):** As my colleague Jim Mather has stated, the Scottish National Party welcomes the Executive's proposals. We look forward to seeing what the Executive will outline and develop, but we are happy to support the principle.

I also pay tribute to Jamie McGrigor for having brought the issue to the Parliament and for having focused the debate. All parties have acknowledged that tartan is part of Scottish identity. It is iconic and immediately recognisable as being Scottish—whether to 98 per cent of the world's population or less. We should welcome that and think of tartan as an opportunity and an asset; we should not hide from it or view it as an embarrassment.

The minister was correct to say that tartan has provoked many mixed feelings in Scotland: ambivalence from some and scorn or pride from others. That has caused a great deal of angst and debate over recent generations, as a battle developed over whether we should promote ourselves as a kailyard country with a Harry Lauder image or as a contemporary and vibrant nation and a socially and scientifically modern country that is built on learning. However, there is no reason why we should not be able to marry the two, and that is what we must do. They are not mutually exclusive: it is possible to have an element of the kailyard and, at the same time, be a vibrant, contemporary nation. Scotland must come to terms with that.

The problem is not with expatriate Scots or the 98 per cent—or whatever percentage—of people throughout the world who have the impression that tartan is related to the kilt. The issue is a mental image of Scotland. We must recognise that there is no problem with promoting tartan at the same time as promoting a modern, vibrant country that is based on learning, a modern economy or whatever else. The fact that that is possible is demonstrated by the booming tartan sector, which the minister touched on, and by the Scottish diaspora that many speakers have commented on.

I mentioned the booming tartan sector. Earlier this week, I met one of the key players in the dressed to kilt event, which has become a fashion fixture not only in New York, but in Los Angeles and California. It is not necessarily my cup of tea, but it has put the First Minister on the catwalk and it provides an opportunity for Scottish manufacturers to sell their wares. We should not denigrate such an event, whether we like it or not. It does a lot of good for Scotland, the Scottish

economy and Scotland's image and brand. The organisers of the event have no problem with parading themselves in tartan and promoting a modern, vibrant, Scottish manufacturing sector.

The same applies to our diaspora Scots. Whether they are recent emigrants or are descended from people who left centuries ago, they view tartan as a link to their Scottish identity. We should not seek to take that away from them but should welcome it. We should obviously lament the fact that some of our people have gone, but we should be grateful that they wish to link and bond with us. There would be more for us to worry about if they wished to have nothing to do with us, but the fact that, as Jamie McGrigor said, 30 million people or more wish to have some link with Scotland is a huge asset on which we must build.

As the minister commented, tartan day is highly successful. It is now spilling out of New York and Washington. Whether it is a week in Sydney or events in Chicago, tartan day is going global. That is why Scotland must come to terms with itself. We must realise that being dressed in tartan is not something to mock or mimic, although there may be instances in which it is highly amusing or impractical. For many, it is an iconic image of Scots. There is nothing wrong with parading oneself in tartan on the Saturday of tartan week in New York and working in Wall Street the following Monday. Young emigrant Scots do that, and we must do it as a country. Let us sell ourselves, whether in the kilt or as a contemporary nation.

15:09

**Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind):** I congratulate the minister on changing his mind. I certainly remember the time when he and people of his age group denigrated tartan—I will come back to that thought. I ask him to ensure that the tartan week organisers do not instruct the Scottish Enterprise team that is going to try to evaluate tartan's importance. I also congratulate Jamie McGrigor. There is no doubt about it: he has done the right thing at the right time. It is big of the Executive to have taken his proposals on board.

I wonder why the minister started by referring to the debate about tartan. Ken Macintosh's speech, and even Kenny MacAskill's speech, gave us the answer: they dismissed the thought of Harry Lauder. We can all get embarrassed about Harry Lauder if we like but, abroad, in all those places where people know about Scotland, they might just know about Scotland through Harry Lauder. The late Jimmy Logan explained to me how, in theatre terms, Harry Lauder was quite an icon. We must look less to the confusing images of the past and more to what we agree is the way to use such icons, even if we are a bit embarrassed about

them, to promote Scotland. There is a difficulty with promoting tartan while we are diluting Scots identity and its promotion.

I will draw a parallel: I ask the gentlemen in the chamber to think of lederhosen for just a minute. Where do we associate with lederhosen? I see the minister slapping his thigh—good on him. Is it Austria, or is it Bavaria? I associate them with Bavaria, because I know the subtleties, but most folk are confused about where lederhosen come from. I put it to members that the same confusion might exist regarding where tartan fits into the panoply of the world's patterns. Where does Paisley pattern come from? That uncertainty exists because we have not promoted the Scottish identity and used tartan unashamedly to do so. That is one of those wee things that we will just have to sort out—I am sure that we are on the way to doing that.

The minister said that he would listen to good ideas. I have about six. First, there is the recognition factor. We are kidding ourselves if we think that, everywhere in the globe, people know what Scotland is and can distinguish Scotland from other parts of the United Kingdom. We should not kid ourselves like that.

Once, when I tried to check my bags through from Atlanta airport to Edinburgh, I had quite a discussion—it eventually became quite a heated discussion—with the helpful young woman behind the desk. She asked, "Edinburgh's in London, isn't it?" I replied, "No, it's not in London—it's in Scotland." "Yes," she said, "but that's in London, isn't it?" "No," I said. "Edinburgh is the capital of Scotland, which is a different country." Her nametag said that she was called Marie Stuart, but she did not have the faintest idea that she was part of the diaspora. We must not imagine that the opportunity is already there for us. I want lots of television advertisements and film placements. Let us start with Bollywood—a growing market, I point out to the minister—and there is Chinese television, too.

Although Kenny MacAskill waxed lyrical about tartan week, I do not think that it is big enough or focused enough yet. We should be getting in touch with Craig Ferguson, for example, and ensuring that really nice tartan ties and other tartan accoutrements are sent to him, so that he can refer to them when he presents his show, which is one of the biggest coast-to-coast shows in America.

Why does the Parliament not use tartan? The colours that we have are very fetching, but we could use tartan much more. I am sorry to see that the Presiding Officer is looking at me like that, because I wanted to go on to mention tartan tat. As a representative of this country, I am sometimes concerned when I see the tat on sale

up and down the High Street. However, I remember what I said at the start of my speech. Ken Macintosh should not get embarrassed about Harry Lauder, and I will not get embarrassed about the fact that some folk have different tastes from mine. That is what tartan tat amounts to, and no more.

15:14

**Christine May (Central Fife) (Lab):** The Scottish Register of Tartans Bill came before the Enterprise and Culture Committee, and I rise as a member of that committee to discuss how we reacted to it and how our thinking evolved.

Like many other members, I started by thinking that tartan is a recent addition that grew with the Victorians and which has nothing to do with history. The bill is being promoted by a Tory. He proposes that we have a separate register and keeper, yet I thought that the Tories were all about reducing bureaucracy. I argued that the bill was not necessary, because it should be possible to get agreement among the existing privately-owned registers.

I then thought about the history of tartan. There is an argument that poor people rarely had access to dyes or fancy patterns, that tartan was used mainly to signify rank and wealth and that only the rich could afford the patterns and coloured cloths. I wonder about that when I think about the pink lining in Jamie Stone's jacket—it is a pity that he is not here to show us it.

As incomes rose among the Victorian business classes on the back of commercial activities, which we heard the moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland describe earlier, people started to become interested in all things supposedly Scottish and the tartan market boomed. Tartan has become a symbol and an emblem of Scottish culture and, yes, there is evidence that it has been used for hundreds of years.

Jim Mather talked about having new and interesting things. Tartans have been created for the G8, the Highland year of culture, Scottish Power and other big organisations and the Commonwealth games. As I looked into the matter, having spoken to the Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning, the Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport and Jamie McGrigor, I thought that there was a good argument for doing something—I am thinking of genealogy, tourism and commercial activities—to take advantage of something that is uniquely Scottish, whether or not it is recognised as widely as it might be.

I welcome the minister's promise to commission work with the textiles group and hope that that work produces something.

I turn to the issue of a publicly owned and publicly managed register. We have many official registers in this country. I remind everybody of my registered interest as chair of the Scottish Library and Information Council. Many museums, galleries and other registers, including the National Library of Scotland and the National Museums of Scotland, are members of that group.

The Enterprise and Culture Committee was persuaded of the strength of Jamie McGrigor's argument, but we remained unconvinced of the need for legislation and for a separate keeper to be funded. I am glad that the Executive has picked that up and I hope that the Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport will be involved in the discussions, given that she has responsibility for the Registers of Scotland and museums.

I would like to hear in the minister's closing remarks a little more about his commitment to the register and how he hopes that it will be developed. I hope that Jamie McGrigor will be reassured, both by what he has heard and by the evident cross-party support, that there is a commitment to take forward the register, not just in the rest of this session but after the election. I hope that he is reassured sufficiently to withdraw his bill. I look forward to continuing to work with him and with the ministerial team, and I will help in any way that I can, through the Enterprise and Culture Committee.

15:18

**Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD):** With Lochcarron of Scotland, Andrew Elliot Ltd and Robert Noble in my constituency, I am extremely lucky to be the constituency representative of the finest tartan manufacturers in the world—my colleague Ken Macintosh, who has other loyalties, is querying that, but I am afraid that we will have to have that debate outside. I am delighted that we are having this debate and that the Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning has asked that representatives of the Scottish textiles industry and Scottish Enterprise officials take forward the register through formal discussions.

The real issue is how we ensure that our financial interest in this cloth is protected. Margo MacDonald asked Jim Mather to name the two Chinese people who would recognise tartan as Scottish, and I have sympathy for Mr Mather's difficulty in naming them on the spot. However, Margo MacDonald answered her own point: Chinese, Indian and English companies are manufacturing cheaper and poorer-quality cloth—tartan tat, as she said. The issue is how we ensure that that does not harm our indigenous manufacturing industry.

Although I have considerable sympathy for Jamie McGrigor and Ken Macintosh's arguments for a national body and a nationalised approach, I think that every opportunity in the private sector should be explored first.

We have an exciting, dynamic and embracing tartan industry, which has caught the imagination of young people and old across the world, because of the personal commitment of Alistair Buchan and others. Those designers and manufacturers have been the real keepers of the brand since the war. Jim Mather addressed the brand in his speech, which all members agreed with.

We have been debating the ancient cloth of the land—it is grown from the land, literally. The original earth colours of tartan are the earth colours that are represented in the carpets in this building. People around the world see them as distinctive, and they are cherished at home.

Tartan brings a significant financial benefit to modern Scotland. Perhaps more than other features, it has defined modern Scotland itself. Jamie Stone outlined precisely when modern Scotland dates back to—1822, when my erstwhile constituent, Sir Walter Scott, was the master of ceremonies during the visit to Edinburgh of George IV. It was Scott's contention that, only 76 years after the Jacobites were hanged at Carlisle, Highland tartan should clad the King. With the King resplendent in his royal Stewart kilt over—as Jamie Stone said—his salmon-coloured tights, one of the great public relations stunts in Scottish history had been carried off, and modern Scotland was born. Just as the question of branding Scotland is controversial today, it was controversial then. Scott's son-in-law said that the event was a travesty and a hallucination.

**Margo MacDonald:** Will the member give way?

**Jeremy Purvis:** If I have time later on, I will give way.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh):** You will not have time; you have one minute left.

**Jeremy Purvis:** The modern take on tartan, with young designers working in the school of textiles and design in the Borders or in the private sector, represents more than £65 million to the Scottish economy in manufacturing alone, and more than 1,500 jobs. However, we have to cherish the industry. The army threatened to have its kilts and trews made outside Scotland and Heriot-Watt University threatened to remove the school of textiles and design from Galashiels, which is at the heart of the manufacturing of textiles. Both those threats, which have been successfully resisted, highlight the fact that we need to cherish the industry.

The Galashiels Manufacturers Corporation dinner has been held every year since 1776. At one of the dinners in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, James Hogg and Walter Scott sang a song about Borders cloth being “cladding for a queen”. Tartan is cladding for a nation and it needs to be protected.

15:22

**Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):**

This has been an interesting and, at times, entertaining debate. We have had well-informed contributions from across the chamber.

It would be appropriate to start my speech by commending my colleague Jamie McGrigor for the effort that he put into producing his Scottish Register of Tartans Bill, which is what lies behind this debate and the process that we are engaged in.

A lot of time and effort goes into the production of a member's bill. Members have to devote a lot of their time and their staff's time to ensuring that the bill progresses, and there are a lot of steps to go through with regard to consultation and so on. It is no small thing for any member to lodge a member's bill and see it make some progress. We should acknowledge the work that Jamie McGrigor has done on his bill and thank him for it.

The intention behind the bill was the establishment of a publicly funded state register of tartans that, it was envisaged, would replace the existing private registers, which, in some ways, are in competition with each other and are, as the minister acknowledged earlier, incomplete.

Although, as a Conservative, I always resist the idea of the state taking over successful private enterprises, there is an argument for a gap in the marketplace to be filled in order to address concerns that exist about the incompleteness of the registers and to counter the concern, which Jamie McGrigor expressed, that another country, such as Canada, could set up a register and take away what should be our birthright in Scotland.

There has been general support for the principles of the bill from the industry. I welcome the support that has been expressed by the Scottish Executive for the general approach that the bill takes. I understand that the Executive will consider ways of progressing the issue, including non-legislative options and the commissioning of an economic impact assessment.

It has been acknowledged across the chamber the tartan is an internationally recognised symbol of Scotland. There will be some who dismiss tartan as a Victorian affectation and invention—Christine May acknowledged that in her contribution—but its roots go much further back. In his speech, Jamie Stone rather stole my thunder

by giving a history lesson, so I will cut short my history lesson. However, it is important to remember that tartan was banned in 1747 by the act of proscription. The only exception was for uniforms of the Government army, and anyone transgressing the law would

“be liable to be transported to any of His Majesty’s plantations beyond the seas, there to remain for the space of seven years.”

It was some years later—in 1782—that the wearing of tartan was permitted. That move was accompanied by a proclamation declaring:

“This must bring great joy to every Highland Heart. You are no longer bound down to the unmanly dress of the Lowlander.”

As we have heard, tartan very quickly became fashionable. It was that great Scottish Tory, Walter Scott, who made tartan and Highland culture fashionable once again to the extent that, as we have heard, George IV wore a kilt when he came to Scotland in 1822.

What had been the culture exclusively of the Highlands became identified as the culture of the whole of Scotland, which was quite a change. Previously, lowlanders would have disdained Highland culture or looked on highlanders as strange savages from north of the Highland line, but suddenly everything associated with the Highlands—tartan, kilts, bagpipes and claymores—became what we now recognise as part of Scottish culture.

I will close following my abbreviated history lesson. I thank Jamie McGrigor again for introducing the Scottish Register of Tartans Bill and giving us the opportunity to debate the issue.

15:26

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

The debate is useful because Jamie McGrigor has got to the heart of one of the iconic symbols of Scotland and has forced the Government to respond. It was interesting to hear that Scottish Enterprise will conduct an economic impact assessment of the tartan and textiles industry.

The debate also flows around the idea of cultural impact. How do we assess the cultural impact of tartan? It is one of the most positive items that we have in Scotland, and many speakers have reflected on the fact that the overall view of tartan is that it is instantly recognisable and something that we ought to cherish.

The vexed questions are how we deal with copyright, authenticity and other issues. There are various ways of doing that, but I am not sure that to create another quango would be good. We must be careful about how we consider registers and their cost. The minister must think carefully about

how to apply the economic impact assessment so that it leads to a means of liberating rather than constraining the trade. I agree with Jeremy Purvis on that.

To illustrate my speech, I am wearing a tie of the Breton national tartan, which is registered in Crieff. It uses the black and white of the Breton flag, or gwenn ha du; the blue of the sea, armor; and the green of the land, argoat. It respects the Scottish tradition but represents people in a different country. Already, tartan is an international product.

Last week, I read about the creation of a Polish tartan, which is mainly red and white like the country’s flag. The person who bought it, a baker of Polish origin who lives in Edinburgh, said:

“I’m Polish, but I am living in Scotland now... I want to be seen as a Scottish person. A Polish tartan seems like a good idea.”

I hope that we could reflect here the respect that is given to tartan internationally.

I hold the unpaid position of honorary president of the Kilt Society de France. It is one of those odds things that crops up after attending a Celtic tartan day event, not in America but in Paris. This year’s is in Normandy. The point is that many people around the world want to reflect the type of dress that has become known as Scottish. In doing so, they honour the tradition of tartan and spread the good word.

As I said at the beginning, many tartans—the Breton tartans, the Normandy tartan and so on—are registered at Crieff. That provides a fix in the world at present. However, it is essential that we ensure that the next generation knows that it can go to one source.

It is perhaps an overstatement to say that tartan is unregulated, because people have sought to establish authenticity. However, authenticity means something entirely different now when people can invent a Parliament tartan privately—to exploit the creation of Parliament—a Polish tartan, a Breton national tartan and so on. We must think very carefully about how we will achieve our aim.

Naturally, the Scottish National Party wants positive images of Scotland to be cared for and looked after in a fashion that takes them forward. Jamie McGrigor began to explore the issue well, but the question of a register will have to be part of the minister’s thinking beyond any economic impact assessment of the tartan industry, because the issue is about much more than the economy—it is about our cultural impact. I hope that the minister is prepared to take on board that assessment. He might be in the wrong department to do that, but I hope that Scottish Enterprise will acknowledge that it needs to take much more cognisance of the communities and culture of our country and to recognise that the issue has a

scope that goes wider than the pound in people's pockets.

The Scottish National Party welcomes the debate and acknowledges that good will exists throughout Parliament to ensure that tartan flourishes. The tartan that I am holding up is for the year of Highland culture 2007, and was designed by children in Mulbuie primary school in Ross-shire. It is called the golden broom tartan and was part of an enterprise in education project for primary 6 and 7 pupils. I welcome that. Those pupils' terrific efforts are being recognised through the tartan's use throughout the year of Highland culture. We want such innovation. We want more and more people to invent tartans and to use them.

15:32

**Allan Wilson:** I give Jamie McGrigor and other members the assurance that they seek that the propositions that I will make will meet their aspirations for the range of issues that have been raised.

When Margo MacDonald spoke, I was struck by the words of another national icon:

"wad some Pow'r the giftie gie us  
To see oursels as others see us!"

It is undoubted that some people outside Scotland see us clad in plaid, whereas others see us clad in white coats and leading technological advances in a range of sciences. That can be confusing—as confusing as the difference between patriotism and nationalism, or as the Tories proposing the nationalisation of tartan.

The issue is difficult; it is not easy. However, we have struck the right balance in the debate and have not taken a romantic and misty-eyed view of our history by looking through rose-tinted spectacles at where we came from and who we are. More important, the balance of the debate has centred on the economic and other advantages that can accrue from the principles of what Jamie McGrigor has proposed.

As well as the textile industry, which produces tartan fabric, several industries—including the tourism and genealogy industries—may benefit from tartan. The economic benefits are not easily assessed, which is why we propose to ask the textiles team in Scottish Enterprise to assess the possible economic, presentational and marketing advantages of a tartan register. Scottish Textiles has initiated the process of tendering for the economic impact assessment study and we expect that work to be completed in the spring, so there is a prospect that Parliament will consider the matter before dissolution. I cannot—for obvious reasons—make a commitment for after the May election, although I suspect that the most

probable outcome of that election will be a Liberal Democrat and Labour-led Executive.

There will be three key events this month. On 9 February, the national textile forum will meet to discuss possible ways forward—a tartan register is among the matters that will be discussed. A meeting on an economic impact study involving consultants and the textiles team will take place on 16 February. On 24 February, my officials will meet the Lord Lyon and the registrar of the National Archives of Scotland. We will consider legislative and non-legislative options, including legislating for a national register and placing custody of a register with an existing body, such as the National Archives of Scotland or the Lord Lyon. However, it would be premature to consider the options for a register before a more detailed assessment of the options has been undertaken and the bodies concerned have been engaged with. That is my response to Rob Gibson.

The starting point is the creation of a central and comprehensive point of reference for the tartan industry. In that context, I look forward to the outcomes of the work that I have mentioned. It is difficult to envisage a situation in which we would seek to compel a commercially run register to cease to operate, but the work that the Executive proposes to undertake will get deeper under the surface of the possible issues relating to, and the potential advantages of, creating a register of tartans. We have strong links with the textiles industry in Scotland through the textiles team in Scottish Enterprise, which works hand in hand with the industry, and the national textile forum. That close and on-going work is typical of our proactive engagement with key sectors. We will use the strong and robust framework for industry engagement to consult and involve key industry stakeholders in discussions on the best way forward. As John Swinney and others have said, we should seek to build the consensus that members obviously want in order to take forward our tartan industry and to preserve and protect the icon of tartan for future generations to enjoy.



## Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order 2007

### **The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh):**

The next item of business is a debate on motion S2M-5503, in the name of Tom McCabe, that the Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order 2007 be approved.

15:37

**The Minister for Finance and Public Service Reform (Mr Tom McCabe):** The motion seeks approval of the Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order 2007. As members know, the main purpose of that order is to provide next year's revenue funding for Scotland's local authorities. Parliament's approval is also sought for payment of various additional sums that will be announced during the course of the year.

In my statement to Parliament on 13 December, I announced provisional figures for 2007-08. Since then, there has been only one significant adjustment—just over £2.3 million has been added as a result of the passing of the Local Electoral Administration and Registration Services (Scotland) Act 2006, which brings the confirmed total amount to be provided as core funding to local government for 2007-08 to £8.718 billion. Outwith the order, the Executive is making available about £1 billion to local government in additional revenue grants that come outwith the core funding settlement.

The order provides for the distribution and payment of £8.7 billion in revenue support for local authorities' core services in 2007-08. That money has been distributed using the usual needs-based formula, which has been in place for some time and which was agreed by the Executive and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. I receive an increasing number of representations about the precision with which that formula meets certain local authorities' needs, and have said to COSLA that I would like to review it in due course.

The increased funding will secure higher-quality services for people throughout Scotland. On average, councils' core grants will increase by 4.8 per cent. Over the years since 1999, we have seen substantial increases in the local government core grant. A look at next year's figures alone does not provide the whole picture, so now seems to be a good time to look back at what the Executive has provided to local government over the past eight years.

When we compare what local authorities budgeted to spend in 1999-2000 and what they are budgeting to spend in 2007-08, we find that budgeted expenditure on services has increased

in several areas. In education, we see an increase of 57.2 per cent, which is helping to deliver 3,000 more teachers. In social work services, we see an increase of 80.6 per cent, which has resulted in 9,500 people receiving free personal care and more than 600,000 hours of care being delivered each year. With regard to the police, we see an increase of 47.5 per cent, which has resulted in an extra 1,366 full-time equivalent police officers on our streets.

The order also seeks approval to revise the previously approved figures for 2005-06 and 2006-07. It will provide councils with an additional £137 million to meet already-announced spending commitments that have arisen since the 2006 order was approved. That £137 million includes £30 million for community safety partnerships to tackle antisocial behaviour, £20 million of additional funding for youth justice and £15 million extra for the working with families initiative to help parents in disadvantaged areas.

I mentioned the £1 billion of revenue grants outwith the core settlement. Included in that sum is £400 million for the supporting people initiative, £107 million for community regeneration and £61 million to help achieve strategic waste targets. It is worthy of mention that, when all funding streams and locally raised income are included, councils will have well in excess of £17 billion to spend on services next year. The average council tax payment at band D is currently £1,129. Next year, council expenditure for every man, woman and child in Scotland will be more than £3,440.

In addition to core revenue funding, we will be providing a 28 per cent increase in capital charge support, amounting to more than £900 million. That means that the Executive's total support, including revenue and capital, will amount to £10.6 billion next year.

Most councils are due to confirm tomorrow their council tax levels for 2007-08. Glasgow City Council has already given a commitment that it will freeze its council tax levels for the second year running. That fits entirely with what Councillor Pat Watters, the president of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, said to me in his letter following my statement of 13 December 2006. He said:

"I can confirm that all Leaders in Scotland are committed to delivering a downward trend on average increases across Scotland for 2007-08 and"—

importantly—

"forward into the next spending review period".

I urge all councils in Scotland to maintain that downward trend in tax levels; to do all that they can to keep council tax levels as low as possible; and to ensure that, once again, Scotland's council tax settlement is considerably lower than the settlement south of the border.

**Alasdair Morgan (South of Scotland) (SNP):**

By praising the council tax freeze in Glasgow, the minister seems to be implying that the current council tax levels have been set too high. Can he explain to us by how much more they would have to come down before he could think them acceptable?

**Mr McCabe:** I am a very difficult person to please, but I am conscious of the need for local democracy. What Mr Morgan says is entirely consistent with statements that the First Minister and I have made on several occasions. We want to see downward pressure on tax levels in Scotland. I am confident that, as a result of the order, we will continue to see the downward trend that we saw last year, when we saw the lowest average council tax increase since devolution. I am confident that that figure will be beaten once again and that people in Scotland will enjoy not only relatively small rises in their council tax, but rises that compare favourably with those in other areas of the United Kingdom.

I stress once again that the extra money that we provided to local government was conditional on its fulfilling a range of commitments that will improve efficiency and service delivery. We are not in the business of handing out money for nothing and I know that local government does not expect that to be the case.

**Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP):** Will the minister give way?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The minister is over time, so he cannot give way.

**Mr McCabe:** In conclusion, as I have explained, the order will distribute substantial additional resources for this year and next. A great deal of progress has been made. We need to protect that progress, especially from the simplistic and opportunistic ramblings of parties such as the Scottish National Party.

Local government stands on the threshold of a new era—its relationship with central Government has never been better. Local authorities have demonstrated lateral thinking around public service reform coupled with a determination to improve efficiency in the interests of the people whom they serve. We look forward to working with them in the years ahead.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees that the Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order 2007 be approved.

15:46

**Derek Brownlee (South of Scotland) (Con):**

As the minister alluded to, the timing of today's debate is apt given the imminence of the formal setting of council tax levels throughout Scotland. I

state at the outset that, if this year's council tax rise is lower than that of recent years, we will not knock it.

However, people are not daft: they know that the election will be held within weeks of their council tax bills landing. They also know that council tax has increased massively since 1997.

**Mr McCabe:** As I pointed out in my speech, today's finance settlement is not about this being an election year. Last year, we had the lowest average council tax increase since devolution in 1999. As the president of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities said in his letter, we want that downward trend to continue over the next four years. This is about more than a single year.

**Derek Brownlee:** As I said, people are not daft—they know that the lower council tax increase that might be announced this year might last only for one year, as has been the case with so many such initiatives in the past.

In today's debate, I want not just to address the issues that face councils and voters this year, but to set out some of the bigger issues that will face council services in the longer and medium terms. It is true that every year, without exception, arguments take place between the Executive and councils about the amount of funding that the Executive provides and whether that funding is adequate. Although we have had fewer arguments than normal this year, by and large such arguments arise every year.

**Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD):** Were there never such arguments under the Tories?

**Derek Brownlee:** I will not rise to the bait that Mr Rumbles has offered.

Whatever their political affiliation, all members would agree that we should have a strong tier of local government that should be accountable to the public whom it serves both for the services that it provides and for the level of tax that it levies. If a council wants to tax more and spend more, that should be fair enough, if it is acceptable to local voters.

**The Deputy Minister for Finance, Public Service Reform and Parliamentary Business (George Lyon):** How does the member explain his position, given that when they were in Government, the Tories used capping to ensure that that did not happen?

**Derek Brownlee:** In 1996, I was at university rather than in Government. Mr Lyon might notice that some things have changed. If he is so against capping, perhaps he will rule out ever capping the budget of any local authority in Scotland, although I am not sure that that is necessarily his position.

As I was saying, if voters want a council to spend less and to tax less, that is also fair enough. Although some members might think that councils should be reduced to being mere agents of national Government, I do not believe that that is the best future for them. Local government should be as accountable as possible to the people whom it serves.

Ideally, local government should raise more of the money that it spends. However, whatever view one takes of the council tax, the current level of council tax has reached the limit of public acceptability. I believe that people should know whether their local council's spending decisions are a result of ring fencing by the Executive, whether their area is receiving its fair share of finance from the Executive and whether their council is as efficient and effective at spending the money as they have a right to expect. However, the current system of financing—whatever else might be said about it—is far from clear. To describe it as smoke and mirrors would be a significant understatement.

Let me focus on ring fencing. In the equivalent debate last year, the Minister for Finance and Public Service Reform said to my colleague David Davidson:

"only 9 per cent of the core settlement that goes to local government is ring fenced."—[*Official Report*, 8 February 2006; c 23135.]

The Burt report makes for interesting reading on that issue. It says that

"The division of powers and responsibilities between local and central government is not clear cut",

and it continues:

"We attempted to find out how much discretion local authorities have over how they spend the income they receive today. We were unable to obtain hard evidence."

The Society of Local Authority Chief Executives told the Burt review that, in practice, perhaps only 10 per cent of what local authorities spend is at their discretion. The report concluded that the relationship between central and local government is far from being the great relationship to which the minister alluded in his speech. It states:

"there is a corrosive argument about the relationship between central and local government ... the Scottish Parliament, the Scottish Executive and the local authorities must grasp this nettle. Unless and until they do so, the underlying problems ... will remain."

I commend the councils to which the minister referred, which have implemented efficiency schemes and kept council tax rises low. People have a right to know whether that is happening, but we need to address the bigger issue. Local government finance is complex—I seek in no way to deny that—but we need to have some form of independent oversight of the funding that the

Executive provides, so that the public can make an objective assessment of what is being provided. We will not get an objective assessment of the adequacy of finance from ministers, from councils or from Opposition parties.

I hope that the amendment that I will move today, which is couched in remarkably consensual and constructive terms for this time in the political calendar, will find favour with all members who are keen to raise the standard of debate about local government finance.

I move amendment S2M-5503.1, to insert at end:

"but, in so doing, considers that the accountability of both the Scottish Executive and local authorities for their role in determining the level of the council tax, and the impact on services provided, would be strengthened by a more transparent budget process with a reduced level of 'ring fencing' of grants to local authorities by the Executive."

15:51

**Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP):** Over the past two years, the debate on local government has been helpfully informed by the reports of Parliament's Finance Committee on the overall Scottish Executive budget. In its report on the 2006-07 budget, the committee highlighted the fact that local government was being asked to make efficiency savings that were a much higher proportion of its budget than those that other areas of government were being required to make. The committee expressed its concern that local authority budgets were being top-sliced in the light of expected efficiency gains, and that other services that the Executive funds were not being dealt with in that way. The committee asked the Government to use additional resources from pre-budget report consequentials to rectify the shortfall in local authority funding and to keep council tax down. The Government chose to ignore the Finance Committee and, as a consequence, council tax rose significantly last year.

In its report on the 2007-08 budget, the Finance Committee notes

"the lack of movement on"

the issue of local government funding

"since last year and reiterates its 2005 recommendation that the Executive use any additional resources to rectify the problems of local government funding this year to allow councils to reinvest savings in frontline services and to exert downward pressure on council tax levels".

The Government has now acknowledged the financial position that faces local government and council tax payers this year. I welcome the minister's announcement in December of an increase in resources for local authorities. It is long overdue and is an admission by the Executive that it has short-changed local authorities. The minister

must accept that the financial squeeze that he has applied to local government has played a large part in increasing the burden of council tax on council tax payers in Scotland.

**Mr McCabe:** I know that Mr Salmond is in the habit of making things up as he goes along in television studios, but I did not know that that habit is contagious. The council tax increase in Scotland last year was the lowest since 1999—that is a statistical fact. I wonder whether Mr Swinney is to some extent crying crocodile tears. I understood that the Scottish National Party had announced a compulsory freeze in council tax levels for the next two years.

**Mr Swinney:** If Mr McCabe does not believe that council tax is a significant burden on the electors of Scotland, he should reflect on the fact that the tax has increased by 60 per cent since the Government took office in 1997.

The SNP hopes that the increase in resources that the Government has announced will help to keep council tax levels down and to protect local taxpayers and services.

**George Lyon rose—**

**Mr Swinney:** I cannot take an intervention from Mr Lyon, as I have only four minutes.

We must look at this financial settlement in the context of the Government's long-term record. When Labour came to power, local government received 36 per cent of total Scottish Office spending. By 2005-06 the figure had fallen to 31.8 per cent, despite the fact that burdens on local authorities had increased. Welcome as the recent increase in funding happens to be, the Government has loaded local authorities with more burdens but has reduced the share of the budget that they command. With the increase in burdens has come a 60 per cent increase in council tax since Labour came to power. The inevitable conclusion is that council tax payers have been punished by the Lib-Lab Executive through its underfunding of local authorities in Scotland.

We believe that council tax payers have suffered more than enough under the current Administration. For that reason, we have pledged that an SNP Administration would freeze the council tax in advance of the introduction of a local income tax. We propose to pay for the freeze by allowing local authorities to retain their efficiency savings, as the Government has allowed Government departments to do. We would continue with an efficient government programme, but we would allow local authorities to retain their contribution to efficient government in order that they could freeze council tax levels—in other words, we would enter into agreement with local authorities that they could retain their efficiency

savings in return for freezing the council tax in Scotland.

The SNP has a vision of local government and central Government working together to deliver for the people of Scotland. We want councils to be partners in the delivery of high-quality public services that are democratically accountable to their communities, so a high priority of an SNP Administration would be to reduce the burgeoning quango state and to put more responsibility into the hands of locally elected members of local authorities. By that approach, we would simplify government in Scotland and make it more efficient. Into the bargain, we would start the process of rejuvenating local authorities and restoring local democratic control. Those measures would bring people closer to the local authorities and give people more say in what happens in their communities. Those aspirations are in tune with those of the people of Scotland. We look forward to taking them to the communities of Scotland.

15:56

**Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD):** The SNP might want to freeze council tax for the next two years; the Liberal Democrats want to get rid of it.

There can be no doubt that the 4.7 per cent increase in funding for our local authorities next year, as announced by the minister, is very welcome. The £8.7 billion that has been allocated to councils is a substantial sum by any measure, despite what the SNP says. It is a necessary investment because local authorities play a crucial role in the delivery of vital local services.

I am sure that we all hope that that above-inflation increase of 4.7 per cent will enable councils to keep council tax rises to a minimum. That will not be an easy exercise. Councils such as Aberdeenshire in my area will struggle in that regard. The minister mentioned in his speech that he wants to review the funding formula and that is excellent news. When he does so, I would like him to look at Aberdeenshire's case in more detail. At first glance, the minister will see that the figures show that Aberdeenshire has done very well out of this year's settlement. It received from the Executive an increase of 5.2 per cent, which is half a percentage point above the average. The problem, however, with looking at a percentage increase alone is that it does not take into account the baseline that is used.

Back in 2000, Aberdeenshire received just 88 per cent of what it should have received had the allocation been made purely on a population count. Under the current settlement, it receives 90 per cent. Aberdeenshire's population, however,

continues to grow—the economy is booming and people want to move there.

**Bristow Muldoon (Livingston) (Lab):** Is the implication of Mr Rumbles's speech about the population allocation of resources an argument that no account should be taken of deprivation?

**Mike Rumbles:** I wish that the member had waited just a little longer—I was about to say that no one argues that councils should be allocated funds simply on the basis of their population, but that the distribution formula that the Executive uses to disburse the money is flawed.

I was extremely disappointed in the recent Burt review of local government finance. I asked Sir Peter Burt about the reform of the distribution formula when he appeared before the Local Government and Transport Committee a few weeks ago and he said that since only Orkney and Aberdeenshire out of 32 councils had made detailed submissions on the formula, he assumed that it must be okay. That was not an impressive response. As I said at the time, alarm bells should have been ringing when 30 councils were content with the distribution formula and two councils were not content but could do nothing about it because the other 30 councils would not take any action. I was delighted to hear the minister say today that he would look at that matter.

That was the point at which Sir Peter Burt could have fulfilled his remit by examining the issue independently, but he passed the buck and recommended simply that the Executive look at the issue in the future. I hope that the new Executive that is formed after the election on 3 May will reform the system as soon as possible.

Whatever system is chosen to distribute Executive funds to our councils, it will not please everyone. However, the rub is that there should be a floor in the funding allocation below which no council should be allowed to fall. After all, no council can be expected to finance its services with less than 95 per cent of the average funding that is received by other councils, and introducing a band of between 95 and 105 per cent for every council should provide the variability required to deal with variations in need between councils.

I am not happy with Sir Peter Burt's comments about the distribution formula. However, his comment that the council tax itself could not be reformed was illuminating, although it is a pity that he could not support a local income tax. In any case, his comment to the Local Government and Transport Committee that such a tax would be a "disincentive to work" showed where he was coming from—oh boy, did it ever. Such a man was always unlikely to favour such a proposal, which is perhaps why the First Minister chose him to chair the review. Of course, I have to point out that that is pure speculation.

There is little doubt that this is a good settlement from the Scottish Executive and we will find out tomorrow whether our councils have—as I hope—been able to hold any rises in council tax to inflation levels. However, I make the plea that the Scottish Executive that is formed after 3 May—however it is made up—should scrap the council tax, replace it with a fair local income tax and urgently consider reform of the distribution formula.

16:01

**Bristow Muldoon (Livingston) (Lab):** First and foremost, the Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order 2007 that we are being asked to agree sets out a local government settlement that will continue the stable financial support for services that we have seen since the Parliament was established. The settlement contains £8.7 billion in core revenue budget support for local authorities and, as the minister indicated, other funding streams in the budget bring Executive support to £10.6 billion.

That stable financial framework has enabled local authorities to expand and improve important public services throughout Scotland. Indeed, we can all see such improvements in the communities that we represent. In West Lothian, the extra £12 million in the current settlement represents a welcome 5 per cent increase and allows the council to continue its work over recent years to increase the number of teachers and classroom assistants in our schools; to build new and improved school buildings; and to give every three and four-year-old a nursery place. As a result of all that investment in education, attainment levels in our schools are rising and more of our young people are going on to achieve in education, employment, sports and the arts.

Away from education, one can see how the stable and growing local government finance budget of recent years has benefited Scotland's older people through the introduction of better and more comprehensive services such as, for example, the installation of smart technology in thousands of homes in the communities that I represent.

**John Swinburne (Central Scotland) (SSCUP):** Will the member give way?

**Bristow Muldoon:** I want to continue, if I may.

Roads and paths are being better maintained, and the level of household recycling has improved substantially. All those and other achievements that I have seen locally no doubt contributed to West Lothian Council being recognised as 2006 UK council of the year.

I point out to Mr Brownlee that West Lothian Council has managed to stabilise council tax

levels at or around the level of inflation not only in this election year, but throughout the four years of this parliamentary session.

**Derek Brownlee:** Will the member give way?

**Bristow Muldoon:** No, I have only four minutes.

Of course, all those achievements would be put at risk under the nightmare scenario of an SNP-led Executive emerging from this year's elections. It was particularly rich for Mr Swinney to talk about the financial squeeze on local authorities under the current Executive. As some of my colleagues have revealed this afternoon, the SNP's spending plans for a four-year devolved Administration have an £8 billion black hole at their heart—and that is even before they take into account the cost of separating Scotland from the UK.

Under the ensuing reckless and chaotic financial regime, local government would not be spared the necessity of cuts in front-line services. For example, one of the SNP's unfunded policies is its promise to cap the ruinous local income tax. In the face of a strong Labour campaign last summer, during which we exposed the damage that the SNP policy of a local income tax would do to the Scottish economy—I point out to Mr Rumbles that the Liberals' plans would do that, too—and the hurt that working families would feel, Nicola Sturgeon promised at the SNP conference to place a cap on local income tax.

**Mike Rumbles:** Will the member give way?

**Bristow Muldoon:** No. I have only 30 seconds left.

Nicola Sturgeon was not bold enough to state a figure at the conference, although *The Herald* reported that her spin doctors had put a figure of 3p in the pound on the pledge. Of course, the problem for the SNP is that its policy of a cap of 3p in the pound would cost £1.1 billion of local government finances. Will those SNP members who are yet to speak confirm the figure of 3p in the pound? Will they also confirm where the £1.1 billion will come from, in terms of service cuts or tax rises elsewhere?

The Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order 2007 allows a continuation of the stable financial framework for local government services, which will result in continuing improvements in local services. If the SNP were to achieve the results in the elections that Mr Salmond regularly predicts, the result would be financial chaos for Scotland's councils and a reversal of the progress that has been made in Scotland's schools over the past eight years. I support the order.

16:06

**Brian Adam (Aberdeen North) (SNP):** I am happy to confirm to Bristow Muldoon that the

maximum for any local income tax under the SNP will be 3p in the pound. I am delighted to see that Bristow Muldoon is capable of recycling the lies that were perpetrated in the briefing that he has clearly had from his party researchers, albeit that it kind of missed the mark.

I was delighted to hear Tom McCabe say that this is the start of a new era. I think that the new era will be the replacement of the Labour Party in the Executive and the replacement of many redundant Labour councils under the new voting system that will be used in May. Yes, there will be a new era following the clearout of Labour dead wood and the removal of its dead hand from local government finance.

Seven of the top 10 high-spending councils are Labour run, two are Lib Dem or Lib Dem and Tory run, and one is led by an independent group. That situation proves the track record of the current Executive parties in local government for delivering high council tax charges, in spite of the very generous arrangements that appear to exist for many of those councils. Many of them get a large share of the aggregate external finance, with the possible exception of the city that I represent, which gets the second-lowest AEF and has also set high charges; I would say that irrespective of whether Labour or the Liberal Democrats and Tories were running the council.

My colleague Mr Swinney referred to the 60 per cent rise in council tax across Scotland since Labour came to power. In Aberdeen, the rise is 87 per cent.

**George Lyon:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Brian Adam:** Let me first finish my point.

Although Mr McCabe proudly told the chamber that we will get a 47 per cent rise in education funding and a 57 per cent rise in social work funding—or the other way round—that is a long, long way below the 87 per cent rise in council tax levels in Aberdeen.

**George Lyon:** I am sure that the member recognises that, since the Liberal-Labour Administration came to power, council tax rises in Scotland have been only 33 per cent over the period.

**Brian Adam:** That is way ahead of inflation. In Aberdeen, council tax rises are way ahead of 33 per cent.

We desperately need a review of the council tax funding formula. I welcome Mr McCabe's announcement today that that is the Executive's intention. However, the funding formula must be clear and transparent.

As Mr Muldoon rightly said, we need to address deprivation, but in so doing we must not throw

money at the problem without also having in place outcome measures. Measures of deprivation are built into a series of financial formula, but there is no proper monitoring of outcomes and no measurement of whether spending is delivering any kind of success. That is not happening with the current formula.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman):** One minute.

**Brian Adam:** Are my four minutes up, Presiding Officer?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You have one minute.

**Brian Adam:** Fine.

We need to review not just the local government funding formula and allocations to individual councils, but the way in which the money is levied on the people. The method has to be fair and it has to be seen to be fair. The fair way is a local income tax—I am almost at one with Mr Rumbles on that. It is clear that the people who can afford to pay will pay and the people who cannot afford to pay will not have to pay.

Labour apologists such as Bristow Muldoon are producing scare stories. It is the height of nonsense to suggest that somehow the current stability—as if there is something to be proud of, when Scotland's economy is in steady decline—will be under threat. I hope and believe that the position that Labour holds in Scotland is under threat. The only people who should be worried about that are the Labour politicians who have failed to deliver in our councils and in the Parliament. The general population will be much better off, because we will have a growing economy and sensible funding arrangements through a local income tax, which I look forward to delivering as part of a Scottish National Party team in the next session of the Parliament.

16:11

**Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind):** I will inject an element of sweetness and light into the contretemps between the two putative Executives in the next session of the Parliament. I think that the current Minister for Finance and Public Service Reform is doing a wonderful job and I thank him for the £350,000 that he has given to Edinburgh to help with this year's festival. We are so grateful.

I have talked to the minister about special funding in recognition of the part that Edinburgh plays as capital of Scotland in providing services and facilities that benefit all of Scotland—I use the term “capital city status”. I had thought that in a meeting between the First Minister and the new leader of the City of Edinburgh Council, Ewan Aitken, an agreement had been reached—or at

least that a way forward had been identified. However, I was shocked when the Deputy Minister for Finance, Public Service Reform and Parliamentary Business told me in answer to a question I asked him the week before last that the cities growth fund should suffice. I have spoken to Mr Aitken about that and he agrees that that will not suffice. Where is the Executive in its plans for the granting of special funding status to Edinburgh on account of its capital city status?

16:13

**Dr Sylvia Jackson (Stirling) (Lab):** I welcome the Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order 2007, which provides a stable financial settlement, as a member said. As another member said, local authorities play a crucial role in providing our services.

I am pleased that the Conservatives have changed tack somewhat. It appears from a recent press release that the Conservatives are now supporting local government, although we did not quite get that impression in the past. Perhaps the Conservatives will say something about that.

**Alasdair Morgan:** The member said that there is a stable financial settlement. How does she define stability? Does it mean that no council should have to make cuts?

**Dr Jackson:** As far as I know, there have been no staff cuts in Stirling Council. I will talk about what has been happening in Stirling, so I will elaborate on the member's question.

I am pleased that extra moneys have been found. I looked back at the speech that I gave in the debate on the Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order 2006, which took place almost exactly a year ago. In that debate, Michael McMahon and I talked about the increasing need for transparency in the figures that the Scottish Executive and COSLA produce, so that, for example, we have the same baseline figures. However, we noted that a better liaison or rapport was developing between the two bodies. That rapport has improved a lot in the past year; I hope that that will continue.

I turn to Alasdair Morgan's question. The minister said that higher-quality services will be delivered. In the Stirling Council area, in education, we have five new or refurbished secondary schools, one of which, in Raploch, involves the first urban regeneration company, which is not only building a school, but regenerating the area through housing development. On health, a new hospital is being built. We have the best-value measures, which will be delivered sooner than expected. We have examples of joint working between the health board and the council's education department. In

Buchlyvie, we have the first combined health centre and school in Scotland. I could go on to talk about the first phase of the regeneration of Culterhove and Cornton, which is working.

As Bristow Muldoon said, all those measures could be put at risk simply by wanting, as the Scottish National Party does, to move towards a separate Scotland.

**Alasdair Morgan:** Ha!

**Dr Jackson:** The member may laugh, but we keep asking the SNP about its costings and finding that its policies are still uncoded. The SNP cannot present an alternative Government on an uncoded basis. Even if we take all the oil revenues into account, we would still have a £6 billion shortfall. The SNP must address that. Further, the SNP talks about a local income tax rather than a property tax. I realise that several members have said how much they do not agree with the outcome of the independent Burt review, but it stated that local income tax would have to be set at 6.5p in the pound to maintain Labour's current level of investment in public services. The SNP claims that it would cap a local income tax at 3p in the pound, but from where would it get the £1.1 billion that would be required to fill the gap? Do not tell me that that will come through efficiency savings, because those can go only so far.

Let us keep the stable financial settlement that we have had in the past few years rather than move to the uncoded policies of the SNP and other parties, which would be disastrous. Let us approve the order today.

16:18

**Ms Maureen Watt (North East Scotland) (SNP):** Members who were elected in 1999 may recall that one of the Parliament's first debates was on the report of the commission that was set up to examine the relationship between the new Scottish Parliament and local government, which was greeted with much support from throughout the parties. The McIntosh report stressed the importance of parity of esteem for the new Parliament and local authorities and the importance of engaging the electorate through subsidiarity and local decision making. It is to the shame of the Liberal-Labour Government that the optimism of the new beginning and the new optimism for local government have vanished. Instead, the Government has reduced local authorities to bodies that do its bidding.

The room for manoeuvre for local authorities to do anything innovative and new has disappeared as their budgets have been reduced. Local government is charged with delivering the services that matter most to citizens and which impact most

on their daily lives, including education, social work and environmental services. No local authority argues with the contention that not enough money follows new legislation, which is demonstrated most graphically by the free personal care policy, although the same applies to other matters. According to a report by Professor Arthur Midwinter, Aberdeen City Council's grant-aided expenditure for children's services is £10 million per annum, which is 113 per cent less than the amount that is spent.

It is likely that £8 million will be slashed from Aberdeen City Council's social work budget in 2007-08, and that will lead to cuts in services for the most vulnerable people in society. Because of cuts in its funding, the voluntary sector is under pressure too. Many groups will have to dip into whatever reserves they have. That situation is unsustainable.

As Mike Rumbles said, Aberdeenshire Council has the fourth-lowest AEF per head of population—its figure is more than 10 per cent lower than the Scottish average. I am glad that Mr McCabe wants a review of the needs-based assessment of grant, and I am sure that that will be welcome in Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire. However, it will come too late for the disabled in Aberdeenshire, because the council, looking for cuts, is forcing people to choose between concessionary taxi charges or exemption from parking restrictions.

**Mr McCabe:** It goes without saying that I do not recognise the assertions that the member makes. She knows about today's order; perhaps she will inform us how much additional money she would allocate to local government.

**Ms Watt:** I will leave that question for Mr Swinney. He is the finance man and he has all the figures to hand.

Council tax payers have been hammered by this Lib-Lab Government since it came to power; the increase announced today is an admission of that. It is time for a new era, as the minister said. It is a time for partnership between local government and this Parliament, rather than a time for the councils to do what the Executive tells them to do. COSLA has been silenced and councillors have had their heads down. No councillor finds the work satisfying any more.

The new era, minister, will come with an SNP Government and many more SNP-led councils. It will not come with this Labour Government.

16:22

**Mr Andrew Arbuckle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD):** As an MSP and as a councillor, I have my head up. I do not recognise anything in local



authorities that is as downbeat as Maureen Watt's view.

I welcome the generous settlement for councils, although I admit that councils still face challenges. The minister is right to say that record levels of funding have gone into local government in the past six years. That increase in funding is very welcome. However, challenges remain for councils. We should have a little look at the challenges, because we have not yet done so today.

The implementation of single status has dragged on. The original intention was that it should be cost neutral, but—especially in the early years of the settlement—it has added substantially to council expenditure. With hindsight, it might have been better to implement single status in another way.

Councils are at the forefront of meeting the challenges caused by big demographic changes. Reducing school rolls are one problem. At the other end of the age spectrum, social work services face increasing demands. As policies aimed at social inclusion have been brought to fruition, added demands have been placed on council services. Sadly, those services have to deal with more and more cases of youngsters who are born to parents with serious drug habits. The minister was right to highlight the additional cash that is specifically for social work services.

While the delivery of Scottish Executive priorities is putting pressure on local authorities, they are responding to the Executive's demands to make budget savings through efficiency savings. In a drive to get costs down, many local authorities are now involved in partnership working with other local authorities or public bodies. That causes pain, but it is the same type of pain that businesses face in the competitive world. The business cliché—that financial pressure helps to produce innovative solutions—is appropriate. I know of many people who work in local government who would like to be freed from the management shackles that were appropriate only in previous years.

The setting of council tax levels is forthcoming, and there are proposals that could lead to different structures in some local services. There is a question over whether some inherited parts of councils' work are still appropriate and needed in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In my council area, Fife, the financial controls are tight and the council tax collection rates are in the top bracket. Fife Council has been praised for its financial control. However, there are still areas for improvement. With a tightening economic situation looming on the horizon, the council tax-setting exercise that is presently being carried out could provide long-term benefits—especially if it introduces better and tighter management.

There have been a number of references to local democracy. We should ensure that they are not just words and that we allow local democracy to be a reality. No one has mentioned the fact that many councillors in local authority administrations who are setting the council tax for the forthcoming year will be over the horizon with their settlement packages within a matter of weeks. That concerns me. For example, I believe that only eight of the 30-odd Labour councillors who currently form the administration in Fife will put their names in the frame in May, with no guarantee that any of them will get back in.

Mike Rumbles mentioned council tax. Much of the pressure in the debate has been on the central Government funding of local authorities, but little has been said about the inadequacies of the council tax system. We must remember that it was produced by the Tories in an almighty post-poll tax haste when Derek Brownlee was still at university and did not realise what the Tory Government's capping of local government spending meant.

The introduction of a local income tax—a nice, friendly Liberal Democrat local income tax, not the nasty one that the SNP would introduce—would remove many of the present system's problems, which are fuelled by the council tax.

16:26

**John Swinburne (Central Scotland) (SSCUP):**

Bristow Muldoon was the first person in the debate to mention pensioners. Yesterday, I spoke with a pensioner who was in full-time employment three years ago, when he paid 3 per cent of his income in council tax. Three years into retirement, he pays 22 per cent of his pension income in council tax. It is an abomination that, in 2007, we are squeezing pensioners to such an extent with an unfair tax that applies to only 42 per cent of the electorate in Scotland. Householders pay tax, but it is people, not houses, that use council facilities. The other 58 per cent of the electorate, who are not tenants or homeowners, do not pay council tax and are not interested in pensioners, who are being squeezed—or in disabled people, who are finding it difficult. As long as they are not being squeezed to pay their share, their attitude is "I'm all right, Jack." That is not good enough for the 21<sup>st</sup> century and it must change.

Andrew Arbuckle was the first to mention uncollected council tax. The last figure that I heard quoted for uncollected council tax was 7 per cent, which is absolutely crazy. Income tax collection rates are 100 per cent. It is not possible to escape it, and it costs 1.4 per cent of the amount collected to collect it. Council tax costs 2.8 per cent to collect. If we add that to the 7 per cent that is never collected, practically 10 per cent goes uncollected.

**Mr Arbuckle:** One of the reasons council tax collection rates are not 100 per cent is that people inconveniently die during the year.

**John Swinburne:** That is an interesting observation, but it is of little interest to the honest pensioners who do not contribute to the 7 per cent of uncollected council tax. By and large, my generation pays its dues and does not contribute to the uncollected tax.

The council tax is supposedly fair but, no matter how politicians squeeze it or talk about it, it will have to be replaced with an equitable and fair tax. The Government increases pensions by 2.5 per cent or whatever and is then pleased that council tax goes up by only 3 per cent and that the fuel that pensioners burn goes up by only 28 per cent. What kind of society are we living in?

It is time we all got our act together and did something positive by getting rid of the council tax once and for all. I do not care what it is replaced with, because it cannot be as bad as what we suffer now.

16:29

**Paul Martin (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab):** I will touch on what might be Andrew Arbuckle's new Liberal Democrat slogan: the friendly tax. From my involvement in local government from 1993 to the Scottish parliamentary elections in 1999, I know that there is no friendly tax. I am sure that I do not have to lecture Andrew Arbuckle on that. I wonder whether he really will include such a slogan—I think people would see through it. We will always face challenges in respect of what element of their earnings people see for each pound they contribute. That is an important aspect of the debate.

Maureen Watt raised a point about the McIntosh commission's reference to involving the local electorate. It is clear from the evidence that we received on Tommy Sheridan's local taxation proposal that, with any local income tax, the involvement of the local electorate will be kept to the bare minimum. They will not be able to influence the council budget as they can at the moment. There will be no consultation documents with a local income tax. At the moment, we can influence the local government budget.

A number of successful businessmen would welcome a local income tax—their returns to HM Revenue and Customs are perhaps more creative than they should be sometimes. The buoyancy of the market is related to that.

**Mike Rumbles:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Paul Martin:** I am sorry. I would love to bring Mike Rumbles in, but I do not have time.

Referring to the point that Brian Adam, his fellow Aberdeen member, made, Mike Rumbles should be honest: he does not welcome the deprivation factors that are taken into consideration.

**Mike Rumbles:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Paul Martin:** I am sorry. I will continue for the moment, but I will give way shortly as I mentioned Mike Rumbles. He should be honest about it. I am honest about the fact that I want to include deprivation factors. I am honest about that to the electorate I represent, but neither Mike Rumbles nor Brian Adam welcome the inclusion of deprivation factors.

**Mike Rumbles:** A number of factors, including deprivation, must of course be included. I am saying that there should be a floor and that no council should have less than 95 per cent of the average.

**Paul Martin:** I look forward to Mike Rumbles making the case for Glasgow in that respect.

**Mike Rumbles:** Of course I will.

**Paul Martin:** I had not heard Mike Rumbles make that commitment before, but I would welcome his contribution in future.

In his speech and in his amendment, Derek Brownlee referred to ring fencing. I do not know whether he was at university or in school in 1993, when I was elected in Glasgow in a by-election, but I wish we could ring fence some funding for Glasgow City Council. We had no funding to ring fence during the Michael Forsyth years. We defended services that are in place today. A Labour local council fought hard to represent local people. There are services that exist in Glasgow today because Labour councillors made the case for their local communities. We did not talk about an inflationary increase or even an election-year less-than-inflation increase; we had an increase of 15 per cent in Glasgow—an inflation-busting increase that featured in the headlines of the *Evening Times* in 1993. That was the sort of challenge that the Minister for Finance and Public Service Reform might have faced when he was a council leader, when rises went well above inflation.

Sometimes, there is a case to be made for ring fencing. Derek Brownlee would be the first person to complain if we were not receiving free personal care through our local authorities or if class sizes were above the levels that they should be. Sometimes, we have to make the case to local government that we expect the funding that is provided by the Scottish Parliament to be used in the best possible manner, and we should make no apologies for that.

We should of course allow for some local flexibility, and that is the point that I will finish on.

There have been record levels of co-operation between the Executive and local government. The same elements of concern have not been raised by local government for the past three years, as they might have been before. I welcome that stability, and I hope that we can build on it, that we can get the best possible value from the investment that has been made in local communities and that we can get on with the job of delivering services locally, while being less concerned about the academic arguments over the local government settlement and the local income tax. There will always be challenges, but let us make the most of the record investment that has been made.

16:35

**Mr David Davidson (North East Scotland) (Con):** It is easy for us to say that the order is an election bribe—it is all about timing, as they say. Derek Brownlee was not wrong when he said that people are not daft. The Executive can spin the numbers as much as it likes, but the money comes from the public, so it is giving them back their money.

We need to put things in perspective. Others have considered the time that has passed since the Parliament was established and since Labour came to power in 1997. It is all very well to talk about the 80 per cent increase in social work budgets, but it has not kept up with inflation or with a lot of the other numbers. It is selective, because a lot of councils, not just those in the north-east of Scotland, have problems in their social work budget. That is due in part to additional burdens such as free personal care. We welcomed that—we have no arguments with it—but it has to be funded fairly throughout the country.

I congratulate the minister on his announcement of a review of the funding formula, which is long overdue, although when he will have it is another story. It is still just an election pledge. It would have been nice to see the independent work on it start now, but if it is going to be in the manifesto, that is even better. However, the manifesto had better be several pages long to justify where he might be going with it.

The minister said that councils must make a commitment to efficiency savings, but even though he is a man full of targets we have not heard what he expects from councils. What is the negotiation point and what figures is he looking for? He talked about a downward trend in council tax, but he would not be drawn on what he expects that to mean over time. It is easy to talk about it. He has put his money up front. Will he give us an answer?

**Mr McCabe:** I say again what I said before: we asked councils to exert downward pressure last

year. They did so and produced the lowest increase in council tax since devolution. I predict confidently that they will exceed their performance last year and go considerably lower than the average for last year when they make their announcements tomorrow.

**Mr Davidson:** I seem to remember the First Minister making a commitment about what the levels would be last year—and all of a sudden it went terribly quiet.

It was interesting to hear Mike Rumbles and other Liberal Democrats talk about their nice style of local income tax. I presume that it will be in Mike Rumbles's literature, as well as everyone else's, that as well as the 6.5 per cent increase in local income tax, there will be a 1 per cent property tax. He accuses the Burt commission of getting something wrong.

**Mike Rumbles:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Mr Davidson:** Not at this time.

**Mike Rumbles:** Will he take an intervention, given that he mentioned me?

**Mr Davidson:** No.

**Mike Rumbles:** How rude.

**Mr Davidson:** Speaking from a sedentary position is rude. That is fine.

Brian Adam talked in quite an excited manner about the SNP. Unfortunately, he is not here to respond.

**Brian Adam rose—**

**Mr Davidson:** I beg his pardon; he has moved seats.

It was interesting that Brian Adam and Maureen Watt talked about the review of the funding formula, which we all agree is necessary. I say in response to Paul Martin's comment about deprivation, yes, good work on deprivation was done in each council ward in Scotland a few years back—about 2000—but it was not converted into the funding formula and allocations. We should consider that carefully.

John Swinburne talked about pensioner poverty. He will therefore be supportive of the Conservative policy to reduce council tax for the over-65s by 50 per cent. Unfortunately, because of European rules, we cannot reduce it for people aged over 60, but it is a start. We acknowledge the problem.

Margo MacDonald made a lovely comment about £350,000 and thanked the minister for the funding for the festival. What does she think about the fact that, unless the tramway system is under control, Princes Street will be dug up during the festival to put the trams in? She needs to look into

that. Special funding for the cities could be part of the review of the local government settlement that the minister is talking about. I am quite happy to acknowledge that, in what Margo MacDonald says, there are economic issues that affect the whole of Scotland.

Obviously, we are in a pre-election period, but there is a lot of uniformity in what is being said about the level of council tax rises, as opposed to the system of the council tax. There has been uniformity on the need for a review so that we can get fairer funding across Scotland, to give councils stability.

I do not see the stability that Sylvia Jackson and Bristow Muldoon talked about and I know that the public have had problems when they have tried to access public services that are delivered through local government. If free personal care for the elderly is a national scheme, how come every council seems to have its own way of dealing with it? I do not argue with that, of course, as I would like more accountability for local authorities; I think that the minister should let go sometimes, and let local authorities become accountable. As Derek Brownlee rightly said, we need to improve the democratic accountability of local authorities. I am pleased to support his amendment.

16:41

**Alasdair Morgan (South of Scotland) (SNP):** Twice—once in his speech and once in an intervention—the minister said that last year saw the lowest average council tax rise since devolution. No wonder, given the size of the council tax rises that we have had in recent years. It would not be difficult to deliver a lower rise than all the rises we have had since 1999—and, indeed, since 1997.

Today, we have seen the Executive indulge in its typical playing with statistics. It has for some time been trotting out the line that the rises in England have been higher than the rises in Scotland—as if that is a good thing. Should people be impressed by the assertion that, although they are being asked to pay a big rise, it is okay because someone who lives in Carlisle is having to pay a higher percentage rise? I am afraid that that does not wash. The perception of the man in the street is that, regardless of what the rates are in England—or in Timbuktu, for that matter—they are too high in Scotland.

**Bristow Muldoon:** Can Mr Morgan answer the question that Maureen Watt could not answer? If the amount of Government expenditure that goes to local authorities is not high enough—which is the implication of his claim about council tax—how much more central Government support would the SNP give local government?

**Alasdair Morgan:** I think that Mr Swinney dealt with that point in his speech. He said that we would allow local authorities to retain the efficiency savings that they make under the minister's scheme. The minister is always forthright about how effective that scheme is and how much is being saved through efficiency savings. It is only fair that local authorities should be able to retain that money.

**Mr McCabe:** The member cannot have it both ways. Mr Swinney said that the SNP would let local authorities keep the efficiency savings as a replacement for the money that would be lost if council tax were frozen. That is not an increase in resources to local government.

**Alasdair Morgan:** I am quite happy that the statistics that we keep producing for the Labour Party add up—unlike some of the Labour Party's spending commitments. For example, where is the cash to pay for the Edinburgh airport rail link, which will cost £650 million, the Edinburgh trams, which will cost £550 million, the council tax recycling pledge, which will cost £200 million and all the other promises on the list, which goes on for a considerable time? It is not the SNP that plays around with figures; it is the Labour Party, which, apparently, never has to account for what it is going to do.

Mike Rumbles made a valid point about the funding formula. Regardless of the local tax method that we favour, no one suggests that local government should be entirely centrally funded. At one stage, I thought Mr Rumbles was about to suggest that extra support should be given only to local authorities whose names begin with an "A", which would have pleased him and his ministerial colleague, as well as my colleague, Brian Adam, but I think his suggestion of a 95 per cent to 105 per cent band around the average, outside of which no one should fall, is worthy of examination. As the minister said, this is not an issue that anybody is ever going to be happy with but, clearly, the current formula is running into problems.

I was surprised that the Liberal minister seemed pleased to claim in an intervention that council tax has gone up by only 33 per cent since devolution. We are meant to be glad about that, so let it be recorded that, according to the Liberal Democrats, a 33 per cent increase is to be welcomed when inflation, pensions and fixed incomes are going up by far less. It is a pity for them that a lot of people in Scotland will not agree with that thesis.

In an interesting speech, Paul Martin suggested that local income tax is not to be welcomed because, he alleged, it gives the public no influence over council budgets. It struck me that there is an interesting analogy with this Parliament. Surely the current devolution

settlement gives the Scottish public no influence over the size of the Scottish budget. We just spend whatever we get handed down from Westminster. Mr Martin might like to reflect on whether he would like to carry the increased responsibility that he wants his local electors to have on to the Scottish electors, who could perhaps vote for the Scottish Parliament with total revenue-raising powers.

We are told that the budget is stable. I am sure that members could come up with many examples of local stability. For example, Dumfries and Galloway Council announced last week that 15 teaching vacancies are not to be filled. That is certainly stable—the jobs will stay empty. Local roads everywhere seem to be full of the same holes as were there last year. That is certainly a type of stability. There have been significant cuts in many areas, especially those that are non-statutory or seen as less sensitive.

The problem for the minister is that, no matter how he may dress up the Government's stewardship of the finances, no matter how many very large numbers he reads out—that is mostly what his speech consisted of—and no matter how wonderful he says everything is for local authorities, most people will judge the Executive's performance on council tax. Frankly, the precise increases throughout Scotland this year do not really matter; people are conscious of the size of the tax in relation to their income, particularly if they are on incomes that are fixed or go up very slowly. They will remember another percentage: the 60 per cent increase since 1997 and even more prior to that when the Conservatives were in power.

A Government that is formed of parties that refuse to address a problem will be judged on that failure, whatever else it does. No one claims that reforming local government taxation is easy. Whether it be tinkering with council tax bands—that seems to be what the Labour Party might do eventually—or introducing a local income tax, which we will do within two years of coming to power, any reform inevitably means change to some people but not others.

I believe that when the electorate makes a reasoned judgment, it will decide that it wants to give credit to the parties that wish to address the problem rather than to those that simply tinker at the edges or bury their heads and do not face the challenge that Paul Martin talked about.

Labour and the Liberal Democrats stand condemned by their own inaction in government, when they have had a chance to address the problem. Their chances are running out, and they will have no more chances to do anything after 3 May—when they will make way for a party that is prepared to tackle the issue.

16:48

**The Deputy Minister for Finance, Public Service Reform and Parliamentary Business (George Lyon):** As always, we have had an interesting and sometimes constructive debate, and a number of points have been raised during the past hour and a half.

Let me deal first with the Conservative amendment, which calls for a reduction in the ring fencing of grants to local authorities. As others have pointed out, only 9.9 per cent of the 2007-08 core local finance settlement will be ring fenced. The proportion has remained more or less constant since devolution, and the ring-fenced amounts are provided for a particular purpose.

**Derek Brownlee:** Will the minister address the point that I raised in my speech? The Burt report said that it had found that only about 10 per cent of local authority spending was in any way discretionary.

**George Lyon:** As I said, 9.9 per cent of the local government finance settlement for this year is ring fenced. The rest is not ring fenced and is left for local authorities to decide their priorities. Within that 9.9 per cent, 97.2 per cent of the ring-fenced sums are for police or education-related grants. The charge of too much ring fencing does not add up and it does not stand up to scrutiny.

Mr Brownlee said that the Conservatives wanted a strong tier of local government and that they wanted local authorities to raise and set their own taxes without the fear of central interference. I will quote Mr Brownlee: people are no daft. They remember exactly what the Tories' position was on local government setting and raising its own taxes. He made excuses about university. The university course that he took seems not to have taught him recent Scottish political history, but the general population has not forgotten recent Scottish political history.

I will respond to a couple of points that Mr Swinney made. He claimed that a financial squeeze was being visited on local government and that once his party came to power, it would restore local democratic control. Of course, he also said that the answer was a freeze on council tax and that if the SNP introduced a local income tax within two years of coming to power, the tax would be capped nationally—which would strip away local control. Such statements do not add up. Local populations and the people of Scotland will see clearly that the SNP cannot have it both ways and that the sums do not add up.

**Mr Swinney:** Will Mr Lyon acknowledge—I suspect that he cannot, because of his delight at the 33 per cent increase in council tax for which he has been responsible—that the public might be attracted by a commitment to freeze the council

tax and relieve them of the terrible burden that his Administration has placed on them?

**George Lyon:** When the question was put to Mr Morgan, he gave the game away, because he could not tell us what the SNP would put in place to fund services once the freeze was introduced. The reality of the SNP's budget and promises would be service cuts, because the SNP cannot tell us how much it would promise to local government.

**Mr Swinney:** I am grateful to Mr Lyon for giving way, because I am happy to confirm to him that—as we have said publicly numerous times—to ensure the council tax freeze, we would allow local authorities to retain their efficiency savings and, depending on the increase that was likely for councils, we would supplement the revenue to local authorities by up to £56 million.

**George Lyon:** Comparing £56 million with the settlement that has been announced today says it all. The SNP is looking at cuts to services or its sums do not add up.

I will move on to the points that Mr Muldoon made. He identified that, as a result of the Executive's generosity in the past seven years and of the record increase in central financing to local government, we have better services for the elderly, more teachers, extra classroom assistants and higher recycling rates. However, I was a little concerned that he spoiled his speech when he criticised local income tax and said that he thought that it might cause damage. As he is probably aware, there were two or three interesting observations in the Burt committee's report, one of which was the recommendation that the council tax should not be retained in its current form—the committee gave reasons for that.

Margo MacDonald was concerned about the need for extra funding for the City of Edinburgh Council to recognise Edinburgh's capital city status. On hearing Mrs MacDonald's speech, I wondered whether she and Mr McCabe had engaged in private discussions about possible—dare I say it—sweetheart deals for Edinburgh. Surely not. I am sorry to disappoint her by reiterating what I said in my previous answer to her. The cities growth fund exists to help the likes of the City of Edinburgh Council fund and continue to meet the obligations of the capital city.

Andrew Arbuckle welcomed the settlement and talked about it helping to deliver extra services. Like many members of other parties, he highlighted the concern that exists throughout the country about the fairness of the current needs-based formula. I know about those concerns from conversations with Orkney Islands Council, Argyll and Bute Council, Dundee City Council, Aberdeen City Council and many other councils. Members in

general have welcomed the minister's announcement that he wishes to engage in a review of the needs-based formula. Support exists throughout the country for such work; it will be welcomed beyond the chamber.

The order provides for the distribution of £8.718 billion, which represents a year-on-year increase of 4.8 per cent. That figure is well above the current rate of inflation. The order continues the trend for year-on-year real-terms increases in grants to councils. It also provides an additional £137.1 million for the 2006-07 financial year as a result of redetermination. *[Interruption.]*

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I am sorry to interrupt, but would you be quiet, please? Minister. *[Laughter.]*

**George Lyon:** Do you want me to sit down?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You know who I am talking about. Minister, please continue.

**George Lyon:** The distribution formula that has been agreed with COSLA ensures that every council will benefit from increases of 4.8 per cent next year. Several members have highlighted that there is concern about the distribution formula.

**Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** Will there be enough money for Argyll and Bute Council to deliver free personal care for the elderly?

**George Lyon:** If he had looked at Argyll and Bute Council's budget for this year, Mr McGrigor would know that under the elderly care budget heading, that council has spent approximately £6 million below the GAE figure. Therefore, we know exactly why care for the elderly is not being delivered in Argyll and Bute and why there is a waiting list there.

Local government is committed to driving down council tax increases next year and for a further three years. The 2006-07 average council tax increase of 3.2 per cent was the lowest since devolution. Council tax levels have increased by 33 per cent since devolution, but that is considerably less than the 57.9 per cent increase in Executive funding.

The increased funding that is provided by the order should help to deliver better education for school pupils, better services for older people, stronger and safer communities and more support for children and their families. We are also continuing to give local authorities the power to decide for themselves how much to invest in local infrastructure.

The motion asks Parliament to approve the order, and thus the revenue support grant for each council for the coming year. The order revises the figures that were previously agreed for this year

and last year. It will enable councils to set sensible budgets and exert downward pressure on their council tax figures when most of them set those figures tomorrow.

The increased allocations in the order will enable councils to increase service expenditure on key services or keep council tax increases to a minimum. That is a decision for them to take. All that I ask is that, whatever decision they reach, they ensure that there will be high standards of service and a fair deal for council tax payers. I am sure that all members support that request. I ask members to agree to the motion and to approve the order, which should help to deliver those aims. I commend the order to Parliament.

## Business Motions

16:59

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman):** The next item of business is consideration of business motion S2M-5552, in the name of Margaret Curran, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees the following programme of business—

Wednesday 14 February 2007

2.30 pm Time for Reflection

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Stage 3 Proceedings: Budget (Scotland) (No.4) Bill

*followed by* Executive Debate: Taking the NHS Local

*followed by* Business Motion

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

Thursday 15 February 2007

9.15 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Solidarity Group Business

*followed by* Independent Group Business

11.40 am General Question Time

12 noon First Minister's Question Time

2.15 pm Themed Question Time—  
Education, Tourism, Culture and Sport;  
Finance and Public Services and Communities

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.55 pm Stage 3 Proceedings: Adult Support and Protection (Scotland) Bill

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

Wednesday 21 February 2007

2.30 pm Time for Reflection

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Executive Business

*followed by* Business Motion

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

Thursday 22 February 2007

9.15 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions  
*followed by* Scottish Conservative and Unionist  
 Party Business

11.40 am General Question Time

12 noon First Minister's Question Time

2.15 pm Themed Question Time—  
 Environment and Rural  
 Development;  
 Health and Community Care

2.55 pm Executive Business

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business.—[*Ms Margaret Curran.*]

*Motion agreed to.*

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The next item of business is consideration of business motion S2M-5553 in the name of Margaret Curran, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a timetable for legislation.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Rights of Relatives to Damages (Mesothelioma) (Scotland) Bill at Stage 2 be completed by 23 February 2007.—[*Ms Margaret Curran.*]

*Motion agreed to.*

## Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:00

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman):** The next item of business is consideration of two Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask Margaret Curran to move motion S2M-5554, on the approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, and motion S2M-5555, on the membership of a committee.

*Motions moved,*

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (Exclusions and Exceptions) (Scotland) Amendment Order 2007 be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that Malcolm Chisholm be appointed to replace Dr Elaine Murray on the Finance Committee.—[*Ms Margaret Curran.*]

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The questions on the motions will be put at decision time.



## Decision Time

17:00

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman):** There are four questions to be put as a result of today's business.

The first question is, that amendment S2M-5503.1, in the name of Derek Brownlee, which seeks to amend motion S2M-5503, in the name of Tom McCabe, on the Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order 2007, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

### For

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)  
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)  
 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)  
 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)  
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)  
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 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)  
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 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)  
 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)  
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (Sol)  
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)  
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)  
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)  
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)  
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)  
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)  
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)  
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)  
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)  
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)  
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (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)  
 Kane, Rosie (Glasgow) (SSP)  
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)  
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)  
 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)  
 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)  
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)  
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)  
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)  
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)  
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)  
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)  
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)  
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)  
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)  
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)  
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)  
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)  
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)  
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 49, Against 67, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The second question is, that motion S2M-5503, in the name of Tom McCabe, on the Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order 2007, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

#### FOR

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)  
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)  
 Arbuckle, Mr Andrew (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)  
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)  
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)  
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)  
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)  
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)  
 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)  
 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)  
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)  
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)  
 Glen, Marilyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)  
 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)  
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)

MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)  
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)  
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)  
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)  
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)  
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)  
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)  
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)  
 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)  
 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)  
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)  
 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)  
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
 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)  
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)  
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)  
 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)

#### AGAINST

Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)  
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)  
 Kane, Rosie (Glasgow) (SSP)  
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)  
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)

#### ABSTENTIONS

Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (Sol)

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 110, Against 5, Abstentions 1.

*Motion agreed to.*

That the Parliament agrees that the Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order 2007 be approved.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The third question is, that motion S2M-5554, in the name of Margaret Curran, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to.*

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (Exclusions and Exceptions) (Scotland) Amendment Order 2007 be approved.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The fourth question is, that motion S2M-5555, in the name of Margaret Curran, on the membership of a committee, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to.*

That the Parliament agrees that Malcolm Chisholm be appointed to replace Dr Elaine Murray on the Finance Committee.

## **Disabled Access (Shotts Railway Station)**

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh):**

The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S2M-5450, in the name of Karen Whitefield, on disabled access to Shotts railway station. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

*Motion debated,*

That the Parliament believes that all railway stations in Scotland should be fully accessible to people who have a disability; in particular, notes that the east-bound platform at Shotts railway station has no disabled access, which means that wheelchair users currently must use an alternative railway station, and considers that Transport Scotland should provide suitable disabled access to this station as a matter of urgency.

17:05

**Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab):**

I welcome the opportunity to raise the issue of improving access to public transport and to our railway stations in particular.

This matter was first raised with me soon after I was elected in 1999. A number of my constituents with disabilities came to tell me of the problems that they faced in using the train service at Shotts. They found it not just difficult, but pretty much impossible to gain access to the eastbound platform at Shotts station. The situation is such that people with disabilities who want to use the train service at Shotts must use the not-so-nearby station at Fauldhouse. For disabled people, there is no point in parking at Shotts station if they are heading west because they will be unable to use Shotts station on their return journey. That is a significant barrier for people with disabilities who live in the greater Shotts area.

The issue was highlighted to me by a young student who studies in Glasgow. He can easily use the service from Shotts to Glasgow, but he relies on his parents to collect him from Fauldhouse. Clearly, that young student is as entitled as any other to enjoy the freedoms that come with leaving school and entering further education. Such freedoms are taken for granted by able-bodied students as they enter academic life. Gaining a sense of independence and self-reliance is one of the many benefits of further and higher education. However, that benefit is—to some extent at least—denied to my constituent.

The central point of today's debate is that the lack of easy access to Shotts station not only creates an inconvenience for those with disabilities, but impacts on their overall quality of life. A recent poll that was commissioned by the Disability Rights Commission highlights the extent

of such exclusion. The poll found that a third of disabled people in Scotland lack confidence in travelling alone on buses and trains. That compares to only 2 per cent of non-disabled people. One of the poll's findings stated:

"frequent and reliable services would encourage travel on public transport by both disabled and non-disabled users, with improved accessibility on buses and trains the second top priority for disabled people in Scotland."

Last year's report from the transport research planning group, which is managed by the Scottish Executive, came to similar conclusions about the wide-ranging negative effects of poor access to transport for disabled people. The report found:

"A non-disabled adult is 50% more likely to make any kind of trip on a day than is a disabled adult ... The average number of trips made per person per day was 1.7 by disabled people, 2.0 by people with a long term illness and 2.5 by people with no disability or long term illness."

It also stated:

"In the light of the reduced number of trips made, disabled adults were less likely to report participating in a range of social activities (e.g. communicating with, visiting, or going out with friends or relatives) compared with adults with a long term illness, or with non-disabled adults".

The report concluded by stating:

"A coherent and comprehensive strategy for achieving equality of mobility should be an integral part of National, Regional and Local Transport Strategies rather than being separate or 'add-on'."

That is the key issue in tonight's debate. We have now reached a point where it is no longer good enough for our transport strategies to incorporate a paragraph or even a chapter on disabled access. Those considerations must be fully integrated into all capital projects and service designs from the outset. The Disability Discrimination Act 2005 and the disability equality duty have provided the statutory impetus that was lacking for so long. We now need the commitment to deliver on those policies and to deliver real changes—on the ground and in our buses and trains.

Agencies such as Transport Scotland, the local transport authorities and First ScotRail have important parts to play in the drive to improve access to rail services throughout Scotland. First ScotRail, in particular, has a vital part to play in ensuring that local railway stations are accessible to all. I recognise the good work that First ScotRail has done since it took over the franchise. In particular, I welcome the publication of its disabled people's protection policy, which sets out a clear commitment continually to improve the accessibility of all ScotRail services. That is to be commended.

I also welcome First ScotRail's commitment to carry out a refurbishment programme at stations. However, progress on refurbishment at Shotts has

been far too slow. I am also disappointed that First ScotRail has failed to provide sufficient information about the accessibility of Shotts station on its website. The website's description of Shotts station states merely—I will read only the part that relates to the eastbound platform—that there is a "stepped ramp down to platform 2".

I do not know whether any members have visited Shotts station, but describing the access to the eastbound platform as a "stepped ramp" is like describing an ascent of Everest as a short mountain walk. There is no ramp at Shotts station; there is a series of steps down a very steep slope. Anyone unfortunate enough to take First ScotRail at their word might have a long wait of at least an hour for the next train to Fauldhouse, because no one who uses a wheelchair could negotiate that set of stairs, even with help. I ask First ScotRail to review the description of the platform on its website, to take a little more seriously the commitment that it gives in its disabled people's protection policy and to begin to move on the commitment that it gave to ensure that Shotts station is fully accessible to people with disabilities.

Members may be aware that recently the south-east Scotland transport partnership and Strathclyde partnership for transport funded a study on improving services on the Shotts line, which I welcome. The study recommended the introduction of a new hourly express service that would cut half an hour off existing journey times. It also recommended that the service should stop at Shotts. It is vital that all the stations, including Shotts, that would benefit from the new, enhanced service should be fully accessible to people with disabilities. It will not be acceptable for people with mobility problems to be excluded from the many benefits that such an enhanced service would offer.

I end by asking the minister to do everything in his power to ensure that work is carried out at Shotts and other stations with similar problems as quickly as possible, so that we can meet not just our legal but our moral obligations. I am pleased to have had the opportunity to raise these important issues in the chamber this evening.

17:13

**Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP):** For the first and probably only time in the Parliament, I am happy to support entirely and without qualification a motion in the name of Karen Whitefield.

Across the parties, there have been two major themes of the Parliament since it was set up. The first is the need for us to have economic and social inclusiveness in a way that we have not had previously. The second, which relates to transport

policy, is the need to improve public transport and access to it as part of an overall approach that is aimed at encouraging people to get off the roads and on to public transport. It is, therefore, a shame that such low priority has been given to upgrading our public transport facilities—in this case, railway stations—for access by disabled people.

Karen Whitefield mentioned the disability equality duty, which was placed on all public bodies in Scotland in December 2006. Two key elements of the duty are the need to eliminate discrimination and the need to take steps to take account of disabled people's disabilities, even where that involves treating disabled people more favourably than other people.

The annual budget for upgrading stations to take account of the needs of disabled people is about £3.91 million a year. I suggest that the total transport budget should provide the scope to increase the amount of resources that are dedicated to meeting the needs of disabled people. The increase that is required would not amount to a high percentage of the total spend.

We are all conscious of the number of priorities that any budget has, but given the importance of economic and social inclusion, of getting people on to public transport and of living up to a statutory aspiration by putting the resources behind the law, expenditure on access to stations should be a higher priority.

Six stations have already been earmarked for upgrading. Shotts is in one of most deprived parts not just of Lanarkshire but of Scotland. If deprivation is taken into account alongside the special needs of disabled people, the case for upgrading stations in places such as Shotts—and in Shotts, in particular—is overwhelming.

In addition, we have a special duty to meet the needs of rural areas. Karen Whitefield has referred to herself as a representative of Airdrie, Shotts and the surrounding villages, but in a sense Shotts is a village, too. Although it is not a great distance from the main settlement, in many respects it is still fairly remote from the point of view of access. If we are to encourage people to get out of their cars and to use public transport, we must facilitate that by ensuring that disabled people have access to stations such as Shotts. It is a key priority.

My final point is that the decision on which stations should be a priority for receiving the money that is needed for such upgrades should be a political decision rather than one that is handed to a quango. It is important that the Parliament and the Executive decide their priorities on the basis of much wider concerns than those that Transport Scotland can examine. An example of such a concern is deprivation. The provision of disabled access to stations is not just a transport issue; it is

about deprivation, equality and—obviously—the needs of disabled people. I am not criticising the minister, whom I know is well intentioned. However, like Karen Whitefield, I ask him to look at the whole picture and to make the upgrade of Shotts station to meet the needs of disabled people a priority.

17:17

**Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con):**

After 5 pm debates are traditionally consensual and the debate on the motion before us tonight will be no exception, for who could argue with the objective of making Shotts railway station fully accessible to people with disabilities?

In a speech entitled “Is Transport Open to All?”, which he made on 23 February 2006, Bert Massie, who is the chairman of the Disability Rights Commission, described transport as defining people's horizons. He said:

“Perhaps the hallmarks of an effective public transport system are the extent to which it can provide for both the routine of our daily life and for the spontaneity we need to feel free and alive.

It should help us to do the things we have to do without the stresses of having to worry too much about them.

And it should allow us to do the things we want to do in order to make life rich and enjoyable.

For millions in Britain, it defines the ability to participate effectively in social and economic life.”

The full extent of the economic impact of inadequate transport provision for disabled people is well documented in the “Mind the Gap” report, which was published in 2003 by the Leonard Cheshire Foundation. It found that 23 per cent of disabled people who were looking for work had turned down a job because of inaccessible transport. Given that a further 23 per cent had had to decline a job interview for the same reason and that 86 per cent of people with a visual impairment said that transport barriers restricted their choice of jobs, there can be no doubt that access to transport is fundamental to achieving full and independent participation in society as a whole. It follows that transport providers have a duty to ensure that in using their services and vehicles disabled people are not treated less favourably than others.

As I understand it, that is not merely a moral duty; it is a statutory duty under part III of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, which was passed by the previous Conservative Government and requires service providers to take reasonable steps to overcome any physical feature that makes it difficult or impossible for a person with a disability to use a service. However, although the deadline for compliance with the act was October 2004, Shotts station is still not compliant. Perhaps

the minister will comment on why that should be the case.

**The Minister for Transport (Tavish Scott):** I might also comment on the Conservatives' record in government.

**Margaret Mitchell:** I am not making a party-political point; I genuinely want to highlight the fact that the 1995 act sought to ensure that every train station—and in fact every public body—would be compliant. Clearly, that is not the case at Shotts station. This issue is important not just for the disabled people who are affected; First ScotRail, which is responsible for the station and is heavily subsidised by the public purse, could find itself the subject of a claim.

The situation with regard to the lack of disabled access at Shotts station must not be allowed to continue. I congratulate Karen Whitefield on bringing this important issue to the Parliament's attention.

17:21

**Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD):** I thank Karen Whitefield for securing this important debate. Although it focuses on the specific case of Shotts station, it has a much wider context.

My first point is that the authorities must take into account the whole range of disabilities. For example, someone who cannot read English—and therefore cannot read notices—might not be able to make the right use of a railway station. A few years ago, people at Edinburgh airport got very excited about helping people in wheelchairs. That was fine, but they encouraged the production of vehicles that people who were not in wheelchairs but who had extreme mobility problems could not get into. We have to consider and deal with the full range of disabilities.

We also have to think about the journey as a whole. Ensuring that people can get on to the platform at Shotts station is a step forward, but it is not much use if people with big wheelchairs cannot get them on to the train or, if they can, they cause an obstruction and prevent, for example, people with bicycles from getting on. We must work through the whole business of getting to the station, parking, getting on to the platform, boarding the train, being able to sit somewhere comfortable without obstructing other passengers and getting off the train at the other end.

Of course, political issues must be considered and choices made with regard to investment. I hope that we can invest sensibly to ensure that, under the current—and peculiar—system in which companies buy trains and lease them to operators, the operators buy trains that are properly designed to take account not just of people in wheelchairs

but of people with all types of disability. If we can provide those people with better transport opportunities, we will enhance their lives and allow them to join the rest of us, contribute to Scotland and make themselves happier. I am sure that the minister will apply his intelligence to this widespread issue.

17:24

**Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab):** I congratulate Karen Whitefield on bringing this very important debate to the chamber. Other members who are present in the chamber this evening have also given their total commitment to the needs of disabled people. Cathy Peattie, who is sitting next to Karen Whitefield, has done a power of work in the Parliament to help disabled people. Another member who has done that is Marilyn Livingstone, who I am sure would have been here if she could have been.

As an MSP for the past eight years and a councillor before that, I cannot say how much the issue that we are debating this evening causes me to be angry, depressed, disappointed and dismayed. No adjective can describe how I feel on behalf of disabled people in Scotland. Who knows whether, today or tomorrow, any of us might suddenly find ourselves utterly disabled and in a wheelchair?

No one—not Railtrack, First ScotRail, Network Rail, the Minister for Transport or previous ministers—has given an absolute commitment to the needs of disabled people. If that commitment had been given, we would have an action plan that set out which stations would be improved. The list would include Shotts, as well as Cowdenbeath, Lochgelly, Cardenden and even Aberdeen where, although the station is all on one level, my elderly constituents have to use the most bizarre arrangement of a ramp to get into the trains that arrive at that station. That is totally unacceptable.

For all the work that has been done on the issue—the parliamentary questions, letters and representations—we have nothing to show the people of Scotland. We have nothing that says that progress has been made on the matter. Progress may have been made at some of the main stations, but what has been done out there in our communities to improve the situation?

If we went for the kind of strategy that Alex Neil spoke about in which we worked first with the most disadvantaged communities, my communities would be up there at the top of the list. The part of Fife that I represent includes some of the most disadvantaged communities in the whole of the central belt. Very few people in those communities are car owners.

**Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab):** Does Helen Eadie agree that, regardless of where a disabled person lives in Scotland, if they cannot access transport, they are disadvantaged? The issue is not about the areas that people live in. Whether a young disabled person is living in Nairn or Falkirk, they are disadvantaged.

**Helen Eadie:** I accept that. I am sorry for getting so emotional on the subject, but I feel so angry about the situation. It seems that we are not being listened to by officialdom, civil servants and ministers. Nothing is being done and that is the frustration. Cathy Peattie is right. She is entitled to feel angry on behalf of her constituents in the same way that I feel angry on behalf of mine. Indeed, all of us are entitled to feel angry on behalf of people right across Scotland. Nothing is being done to address the issue. The Executive has not trumpeted any big initiatives. That causes me concern.

The issues that are raised in the responses that we receive are always to do with ownership. Is it First ScotRail or Network Rail that owns a station? Such issues are thrown at us, but nobody ever sits down and says, "Here are all the stations in Scotland that require disabled access. Let us sort out the priorities. We need a plan of action that will ensure that, by 2012 or 2013, those train stations provide access for all." As Donald Gorrie rightly said, access is needed not only for people in wheelchairs but for people pushing prams, and for those wheeling bikes and so on.

If I feel a sense of total frustration on the issue, I lay that at the door of the minister this evening.

17:29

**Mark Ballard (Lothians) (Green):** I join other members in congratulating Karen Whitefield on securing the debate. I also share some of Helen Eadie's anger about the lack of progress that we have made. More than 40 railway stations in central Scotland still have steps that limit access, not only to people who have physical disabilities but—as Helen Eadie pointed out—to people pushing prams. As a new parent, I echo that anger. Transport is too important in terms of social inclusion for that to be allowed to continue.

First ScotRail has a welcome policy in which it says that it will provide

"all necessary assistance to disabled customers throughout our network, whether this has been booked in advance or not."

However, it goes on to say:

"If you have a special need, please contact us before you travel by calling the First ScotRail Helpline ... Advance bookings can be made through the Assisted Persons' Reporting System (APRS). Please note that we need a minimum of 24 hours' notice."

If First ScotRail really intends to provide access, it is not good enough to ask people to offer 24 hours' notice. The notice period might not seem long if we are talking about a journey that is planned months in advance, but for someone who travels daily it is nonsense that they should have to give 24 hours' notice.

First ScotRail also says on its web page on special needs:

"If the station the customer wishes to leave the train at is not staffed and traincrew are unable to assist the customer in alighting, First ScotRail will take the customer to the nearest staffed station and organise for alternative transport to take them to their destination at no additional cost."

That sounds all well and good, but it is not good enough that people cannot get off at their station but must instead rely on First ScotRail to arrange a special trip. Moreover, the paragraph refers only to situations in which the customer cannot alight from the train without assistance; it does not refer to the situation at Shotts station, which Karen Whitefield described, where the problem is not in alighting from the train but in getting off the platform—again, that is not good enough.

The motion mentions Transport Scotland, but it is difficult to pin down who is responsible, in what Donald Gorrie described as the bizarre post-privatisation rail system. The Rail Vehicle Accessibility Regulations 1998 require all vehicles on the network to be fully accessible by 2020, but do not deal with stations like Shotts station. Transport Scotland makes the valid point that it is working with the Department for Transport to ensure that Scottish issues are addressed, but the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, which was mentioned, is reserved to Westminster and the DFT. The document "Railways for All: The Accessibility Strategy for Great Britain's Railways", which the DFT published, says that

"Train Operating Companies (TOCs) are responsible for the station environment and customer facing assets",

but it makes no specific demands on access. The situation in relation to the responsibilities of Network Rail, Transport Scotland and the train operating companies is confusing.

The Railways Act 2005 transferred a great deal of responsibility for trains in Scotland to the Scottish Executive, but it appears from the current mish-mash that powers on disability access have not been sorted out. As Helen Eadie said, although we continually hear complaints about access, the buck never seems to stop with anyone. Will the minister say who is responsible for access? Does responsibility lie with him, with the train operating companies or with First ScotRail, which owns most stations? Do Network Rail and the DFT have roles? Who will take responsibility for ensuring that we end the absurd

situation whereby there is still no proper access to all Scotland's railway stations?

17:33

**Mr Andrew Welsh (Angus) (SNP):** I support Karen Whitefield's motion on disabled access to Shotts station, in her constituency. The motion rightly says that

"all railway stations in Scotland should be fully accessible to people who have a disability".

I can identify with the situation that Karen Whitefield described in relation to the eastbound platform at Shotts station, where there is no disabled access, which means that wheelchair users are forced to use alternative means of transport to complete their journeys. For many years, I have argued about a similar situation at Montrose station, in my constituency of Angus. Disabled persons who travel from the south to Montrose have three options: they can alight at Montrose and be manhandled in their wheelchairs across the open railway to the platform that gives access to the exit and the town; they can travel further north to Stonehaven and then take the next south-bound train back to Montrose and the exit platform; or they can alight at Arbroath station and take a taxi to Montrose. The last option has the advantage of delivering people directly to their doors, but it is expensive and adds to the inconvenience of the journey.

That discriminatory situation for disabled persons is a long way from the Disability Rights Commission's goal of

"a society where all disabled people can participate fully as equal citizens".

If we truly believe that disabled citizens should enjoy the same rights, choice and opportunities in the transport and travel environment as non-disabled people enjoy, that they should not encounter discrimination or disadvantage when making journeys and that they should be able to travel and use transport services with as much confidence as non-disabled people can, the present situation is simply intolerable. I have been pursuing the problems for several years, but the Government is still far from providing any sort of solution.

The west side of Montrose station is not directly accessible for people travelling south to north because it backs on to water, so all passengers must cross the railway or journey to the next station. Although a First ScotRail station investment plan is delivering one new shelter, which is to be welcomed, the real problem of disabled access remains and must be solved. The station requires a new bridge with two lifts that crosses the railway line at the south end of the station.

I thank Karen Whitefield for raising a constituency issue that applies more widely to disabled rail travellers elsewhere in Scotland. I hope that the minister will deliver real long-term improvement for all rail travellers. As has been said, the issue needs action—people need our help and our action. The minister can deliver, so I hope that we will hear about some of that delivery this evening.

17:37

**Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab):** I thank Karen Whitefield for bringing an important debate to Parliament. Although it is about her constituency, the same issues arise throughout Scotland. Transport is a major barrier that disabled people face in their daily lives. Many disabled people cannot access work, further or higher education or leisure activities—things that the rest of us take for granted—because of a lack of suitable transport or because of trains that they cannot get on. In the Equal Opportunities Committee's inquiry into the barriers that disabled people in Scotland face, the committee heard that, before disabled people make a journey, they need to be confident that they can complete it without difficulty. They need to know that, even if they are going from one end of the country to the other, they can do that and will not be dumped on a platform that they cannot get off.

The issue was raised at every consultation meeting that the committee held. As Andrew Welsh mentioned, the issue is particularly difficult in rural areas. Disabled people want flexible, accessible, affordable and integrated transport systems. People told the committee that they may be able to find an accessible bus that is available when they want it, but when they arrive at a train station, the next part of their trip can be stopped simply because the platform is inaccessible. We heard from one man who is forced to travel more than a mile to get from one side of a station to the other, which he does every morning and night. That is just unacceptable. Until disabled people are confident that accessible transport will be available at all stages of their journeys, they will be discouraged from travelling and will continue to face barriers in accessing work, education and leisure activities, which many of us take for granted.

The roll-out of new rail services in Scotland is a positive development. Karen Whitefield will be pleased to hear that the new stations on the proposed Airdrie to Bathgate railway line will be DDA compliant. That is welcome, but it is vital that other stations be brought up to date and to a standard that gives disabled people access. Older folk and folk with wee bairns also have problems getting on to platforms and trains. This is the



European year of equal opportunities, so 2007 is surely the time to ensure that people in Scotland, regardless of who they are or where they come from, are treated fairly and can travel throughout Scotland.

17:40

**The Minister for Transport (Tavish Scott):** I thank Karen Whitefield for securing the debate. Society's expectations on such issues have risen—a fact that came out in the points that were made earlier about legislation passed in another place at another time. We are more demanding. Members' comments from around the chamber have reflected that, and rightly so. We have to take such issues seriously, and I refute the allegation that nothing has been done. I will touch on that in a moment.

Most stations in Scotland were built more than 100 years ago. They were not designed for people in wheelchairs or people with disabilities. As a result, one third of our stations today are not fully accessible. I accept the scale of the challenges. We are addressing the challenges on three fronts: through the funding of major projects; through a specific Great Britain-wide scheme; and through the First ScotRail franchise that has been mentioned.

To answer Karen Whitefield's and Alex Neil's points, all new stations that are being built as part of our investment in the rail network will be wheelchair friendly. Alloa station on the new Stirling-Alloa-Kincardine line will have level access; Haymarket in Edinburgh, which is being redeveloped, will have new lifts installed; and, later this month at Lockerbie station, work will start on the new footbridge and lifts, which will be available for use by November.

The UK Government's strategy for improving access to the rail network was announced in March last year. We are working to that strategy and are currently funding major improvements at six stations, including those at Dalmeir, Stirling, Kirkcaldy, Mount Florida and Motherwell. Network Rail has developed detailed designs and has ordered the lift for Motherwell station. The programme costs between £1.1 million and £2.7 million for each station, which is a not inconsiderable investment. The 2006-07 programme for more minor works covers 54 stations, so it is not true to say that nothing is happening.

The Equal Opportunities Committee has a close relationship with the Mobility and Access Committee for Scotland and has taken evidence from it on this issue. MACS is consulted every year on the draft programme of work. That is a

highly effective way of ensuring that the programme takes relevant issues into account.

Through franchise arrangements, there are quicker ways of improving facilities for disabled people. First ScotRail spends some £250,000 a year on small-scale alterations and additions to existing stations. For example, new parking spaces are provided for disabled people, as are pick-up spaces, dropped kerbs and handrails. I re-emphasise—and I hope that members will accept—that MACS is very much involved in the process. When designing programmes, we engage fully with people who are directly affected and have legitimate needs.

I accept that our programmes are long term and I accept that that does not assure members that, for example, a lift or particular facilities can be provided now. However, we are committed to providing access to the rail network for all passengers.

**Mr Welsh:** The minister spoke about improvements and about First ScotRail's minor works budget, which is spent on small-scale physical alterations or additions to improve accessibility to stations for disabled persons. That is fine, but it in no way meets the needs at Shotts station or at Montrose station. Something more is needed to fix such major problems.

**Tavish Scott:** I agree. That is why the proposals on access for all are dealing with six stations right now. If we were carrying out the minor works only, Mr Welsh's criticism would be legitimate. However, we are doing other works as well. In addition, at every station that we are completely redeveloping or building afresh, we are ensuring absolute compatibility with the needs of people with disabilities. I accept that there are not that many such stations, but there are some.

At Shotts, First ScotRail has plans to provide two disabled parking bays, dropped kerbs, and a small ramp at the platform for eastbound trains.

**Karen Whitefield:** I am grateful to the minister for his comments. He is right to say that First ScotRail has drawn up plans, but I understand that the proposals were put to one side because there are difficulties with the acquisition of land that will be required to create the two parking bays and give access to the eastbound platform.

Can the minister assure me that Transport Scotland will work with First ScotRail and SPT as a priority to overcome the difficulties, so that we finally have disabled access at Shotts station?

**Tavish Scott:** I am happy to give Karen Whitefield the assurance that she seeks. She will not be surprised to hear that my briefing tells me the point that she has just made. I apologise—I was not aware of that before tonight. There have

indeed been the difficulties that she mentioned. I will certainly ensure that the bodies that she mentioned work together to progress the scheme.

I understand that First ScotRail has written to the group of landowners to seek their permission. There are 108 of them, which seems an awful lot, but I guess that that reflects the complicated nature of land ownership in the area. The letters were hand delivered last Thursday and responses are coming in. We will do our level best to ensure that that part of the process is concluded as quickly as possible.

I accept that we need to make more progress. As I said, it is now more of an expectation in society that we deal with the legitimate needs of people who want to access Scotland's developing and growing rail network. We will do that through the measures that I have outlined and, in particular, we will seek to solve the problem that Karen Whitefield mentions in her motion.

*Meeting closed at 17:46.*

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