

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Thursday 21 June 2007

Session 3

£5.00

© Parliamentary copyright. Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body 2007.

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

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

CONTENTS

Thursday 21 June 2007

Debates

Col.

OLYMPIC GAMES	941
<i>Motion moved—[Murdo Fraser].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Stewart Maxwell].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Johann Lamont].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Nicol Stephen].</i>	
Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)	941
The Minister for Communities and Sport (Stewart Maxwell)	943
Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)	946
Nicol Stephen (Aberdeen South) (LD)	948
Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP)	950
Mr Frank McAveety (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)	951
Jackson Carlaw (West of Scotland) (Con)	953
Iain Smith (North East Fife) (LD)	955
Stuart McMillan (West of Scotland) (SNP)	957
Ross Finnie (West of Scotland) (LD)	958
Johann Lamont	960
The Minister for Europe, External Affairs and Culture (Linda Fabiani)	961
Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con)	963
COUNCIL TAX	966
<i>Motion moved—[Derek Brownlee].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Des McNulty].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Tavish Scott].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Robin Harper].</i>	
Derek Brownlee (South of Scotland) (Con)	966
Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)	968
Tavish Scott (Shetland) (LD)	971
Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green)	972
The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney)	974
Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind)	975
Bill Wilson (West of Scotland) (SNP)	977
Charlie Gordon (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)	978
Keith Brown (Ochil) (SNP)	979
David McLetchie (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)	981
Bob Doris (Glasgow) (SNP)	983
Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab)	984
Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green)	986
Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD)	988
Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab)	989
John Swinney	991
Gavin Brown (Lothians) (Con)	993
QUESTION TIME	996
FIRST MINISTER'S QUESTION TIME	1004
POINT OF ORDER	1015
POINTS OF ORDER	1017
QUESTION TIME	1019
CLIMATE CHANGE	1034
<i>Statement—[John Swinney].</i>	
The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney)	1034
HOUSING	1050
The Minister for Communities and Sport (Stewart Maxwell)	1050
Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)	1054
Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con)	1057
Jim Tolson (Dunfermline West) (LD)	1058

Tricia Marwick (Central Fife) (SNP).....	1059
Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab).....	1061
Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con)	1062
John Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP)	1064
Hugh O'Donnell (Central Scotland) (LD)	1065
Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)	1067
Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)	1068
Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind).....	1070
Ross Finnie (West of Scotland) (LD)	1071
Jackson Carlaw (West of Scotland) (Con)	1072
Johann Lamont.....	1074
Stewart Maxwell.....	1076
PRESIDING OFFICER'S RULING	1080
SCOTTISH PARLIAMENTARY CORPORATE BODY MOTION	1082
<i>Motion moved—[Tom McCabe].</i>	
BUSINESS MOTION	1083
<i>Motion moved—[Bruce Crawford]—and agreed to.</i>	
PARLIAMENTARY BUREAU MOTION	1084
<i>Motion moved—[Bruce Crawford].</i>	
DECISION TIME	1085
LOCAL FOOD	1104
<i>Motion debated—[Jim Hume].</i>	
Jim Hume (South of Scotland) (LD).....	1104
Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP).....	1106
Cathy Jamieson (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab).....	1108
John Scott (Ayr) (Con)	1109
Liam McArthur (Orkney) (LD)	1111
Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab)	1112
Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con).....	1114
Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green).....	1116
Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con)	1117
The Minister for Environment (Michael Russell).....	1117

Oral Answers

Col.

QUESTION TIME	
SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE	996
GENERAL QUESTIONS	996
Firth of Forth (Road Crossing)	996
General Practitioners	1002
Homelessness	999
Moray (Flood Alleviation)	1000
Scottish Servicemen Killed Abroad (Investigations)	996
Sentencing	1001
Transport (Ayrshire)	998
FIRST MINISTER'S QUESTION TIME	1004
Asylum Seeker Families	1011
Cabinet (Meetings)	1006
Chancellor of the Exchequer (Meetings)	1007
Engagements	1004
Joint Ministerial Committees	1008
Policing	1013
QUESTION TIME	
SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE	1019
EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING	1019
Class Sizes	1022
Crichton Campus	1020
Discipline	1024
New Schools	1023
Play	1019
Schools (Funding)	1025
EUROPE, EXTERNAL AFFAIRS AND CULTURE	1026
Artists Grants Scheme	1031
Dumfries House	1029
European Council	1027
European Engagement	1026
European Union States(Diplomatic Discussions)	1032
Members of the European Parliament	1033
United Kingdom Government (Relations)	1029

Scottish Parliament

Thursday 21 June 2007

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

Olympic Games

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): The first item of business is a debate on motion S3M-204, in the name of Murdo Fraser, on the Olympic games.

09:15

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I start on a note of consensus: I hope that all members can unite round a message of support for Glasgow's bid to host the Commonwealth games in 2014. I congratulate everyone who is involved in the bid on the work that has been done to date. It is a testimony to their work that, only last week, John Tierney, who is the chairman of the Commonwealth Games Federation evaluation commission, highly praised Glasgow's bid for the 2014 games. When the evaluation commission visited Glasgow, John Tierney stated that all aspects of the city's bid, from infrastructure to political support, had been "truly impressive". That is a credit to the organisers. I am sure that all members wish them every success in their bid to bring the Commonwealth games to Glasgow in 2014.

That is enough consensus from me this morning. The second part of our motion states that Scottish athletes, in the interests of sport in Scotland and in their own interests, must compete as part of a British team in the 2008 Olympic games and at subsequent Olympic games. I accept that that argument applies equally to the Paralympics, as set out in Johann Lamont's amendment, which we are happy to accept.

Ian McKee (Lothians) (SNP): Does the member also think that Scottish footballers should be part of a United Kingdom football team, as they might well do better as part of such a team?

Murdo Fraser: Nobody is suggesting that we should be part of a British football team. We have separate football and rugby teams and nobody is suggesting that that should change; we are suggesting that there is nothing wrong with the current set-up. We compete as Scotland in the Commonwealth games and as Britain in the Olympic games. As I will point out in a second, that is exactly the way that our athletes want it. It is time that the Scottish National Party started listening to them.

Let me put the debate in context. At the SNP annual conference in Perth in October 2006, Alex Salmond pledged to pull Scottish athletes out of their British Olympic teams, which he wants to happen in time for the London Olympics in 2012. On top of that, various SNP members have voiced their desire for a Scottish Olympic team. Linda Fabiani, who is on the front bench today for the Executive, held a members' business debate on that very subject in 2005. Let us be absolutely clear what is behind that call: it is nothing whatever to do with promoting Scottish sport or Scottish athletes; it is all about the SNP's pursuit of a narrow separatist agenda and about playing politics with the future of Scotland's athletes.

Members do not have to take my word for it—we should listen to the athletes. After hearing of the SNP's proposal for a Scottish Olympic team, Chris Hoy, the cycling gold medallist, said:

"I think if we do that it would dilute the resources and the expertise we've got in the British team."

I echo Chris Hoy's view when he went on to say:

"I'm a very proud Scot, but I'm also proud to be British and I think they don't have to be mutually exclusive. You can be part of a Scottish team and part of a British team."

Legendary Scottish sprinter and Olympic gold medal winner Allan Wells was even more scathing. He said of the First Minister's proposal:

"I am disgusted. What ... Salmond is proposing is stupid and irresponsible ... The SNP has to grow up and realise it is a great honour for a Scots athlete to wear a British vest."

George Foulkes (Lothians) (Lab): Does Murdo Fraser agree that it is possible not only for a Scot to be a member of a Scottish team and a British team but, in golf, for a Scot to be a member of a European team?

Murdo Fraser: Lord Foulkes was doing so well, but he nearly lost me on that point. However, I am happy to concede it to him.

I thought that, in its amendment, the SNP would leap to the defence of the First Minister's call. However, to my astonishment, the SNP amendment contains not one mention of its policy of having a separate Scottish Olympic team. Why ever not? Is that yet another U-turn from the new Administration? Has the policy been abandoned so early in the new session of Parliament, or is it simply that the SNP lacks the courage to put its idea to a vote in the Parliament—and lose?

The Conservatives realise that the SNP's call for a Scottish Olympic team is politically motivated and would do nothing to bring about a renaissance in Scottish sport. We need to encourage participation in sport at all levels and to provide support for elite athletes to fulfil their potential. Experience has shown that pooling resources and

being able to tap into a broad network of facilities and expertise is the best way in which to do that.

Like all political parties, we support the London 2012 Olympics—we are a bit uncertain about the logo, but we will live with it. The Olympics promise much for Scotland, including a morale boost for Scottish athletes in the British team and a network of training facilities for them to access afterwards. We can expect a flow of tourists coming to Scotland as part of their trip to London for the games. Scotland can share in the excitement of the Olympics, which are games not just for London, but for Britain. I accept that Labour should perhaps have managed the finances better and I believe that we should not risk such a large bill for the public purse or allow other lottery-funded projects to be threatened. However, in my eyes, if thousands of Scottish children take up sport after the games, we can say that the money was worth it. I am sure that our athletes will inspire our youngsters.

The Parliament has the opportunity to send a clear message to the First Minister that, on this issue, he does not speak for Scotland; the Parliament speaks for Scotland, and the Parliament supports Scottish participation in a UK Olympic team, as that is good for our athletes, for Scottish sport and for our nation. If the First Minister goes to the International Olympic Committee seeking support for a separate Scottish Olympic team, he will do so in the teeth of the Parliament's clear and stated view.

A wider issue is at stake. In democracies such as ours, the Parliament is sovereign, not the Executive, which merely borrows power from the Parliament. In the end, we represent the people and we, as their Parliament, have the final say. Mr Salmond would do well to remember that when he tries to play politics with our national interest. I have pleasure in moving the motion in my name.

I move,

That the Parliament fully supports Glasgow's bid to host the 2014 Commonwealth Games; wishes our competitors every success in the 2010 Commonwealth Games and looks forward to them building on the 29 medals brought back from the 2006 games, which is the largest number of medals ever won by a Scottish team at overseas games; also wishes the British team every success in the 2008 Beijing Olympics, and believes that the interests of sport in Scotland and our athletes are best served if they compete as part of the British team in the 2008 Olympic Games and at subsequent Olympic Games.

09:22

The Minister for Communities and Sport (Stewart Maxwell): Like Murdo Fraser, I begin on a consensual note. Like many other members, I look forward with confidence to November when, I hope, the Commonwealth Games Federation will

announce that Glasgow is to host the 2014 games. The 2006 Commonwealth games in Melbourne were an outstanding success for Scottish sport. The performance of our athletes exceeded all expectations and they were the most successful Scottish team ever in terms of gold medals.

We want to ensure that our athletes receive the best support possible to enable them to excel in the Olympics and Paralympics in Beijing next year and in London in 2012. We want Scotland's sportsmen and sportswomen to succeed on the international stage, but that success must not come at any cost. Many concerns have been raised in the past months about the amount of lottery money that is going toward the costs of staging the 2012 games. The impact of reduced lottery funding for grass-roots sport will be considerable. Millions of pounds will be lost to such sport because of the raids on lottery funding to pay for the spiralling costs of the 2012 games.

Andy Kerr (East Kilbride) (Lab): Would the member care to address the point of the motion and the debate, which is about a separate Scottish team for the Olympics, instead of giving us this nonsense?

Stewart Maxwell: That is not actually what the motion says—perhaps the member should read it.

The UK Government simply must find other funding streams to meet the rising costs of hosting the London Olympics. Since lottery funding began, about £275 million has been invested in sports projects in Scotland alone, which is a significant investment that we cannot allow to be hijacked. We want as many of our athletes as possible to take part in the 2012 games. It is interesting that other small independent countries send many more competitors to the Olympic games than Scotland sends. [*Interruption.*] The groans from the Labour members show the height of their ambition for our Scottish athletes. At the 2004 summer Olympics only one in every 211,000 Scots got the opportunity to represent their country. In comparison, the figure in Finland was one in 98,000, and in New Zealand it was one in 27,000.

Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab) rose—

Murdo Fraser: Will the member give way?

Stewart Maxwell: No, not at the moment.

Scotland sent 24 athletes as part of the UK team to the previous summer games, but Ireland sent 48 athletes. The clear lesson is that being an independent member of the IOC allows countries to give their athletes the chance to compete.

Murdo Fraser rose—

Stewart Maxwell: I turn to the second half of my amendment. The Scottish Football Association has made perfectly clear its position on a GB football team. It does not support the idea because it regards it as a possible threat to its independent status within FIFA. This Government and many people throughout Scotland, including the tartan army, support the SFA's position.

Not long ago, we all celebrated the fantastic victory of the Scotland team over France. Do members of Opposition parties really want to put all that at risk, which would mean no more incidents like the one in 1967 at Wembley and no more memorable nights at Hampden?

Although for many years the Tory party has been viewed by many as the anti-Scottish party, I will be consensual and say that recently there have been positive signs that it is beginning to distance itself from that stance. Unfortunately, its support for a British football team at the Olympics betrays the fact that it will always choose Britain over Scotland. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Order.

Stewart Maxwell: Despite the warnings from the SFA and the opposition of football fans in all the countries that make up the UK, the Tory party is still willing to risk the future of the Scotland team.

The Proclaimers put the Tory position so well when they sang:

"Bathgate no more
Linwood no more
Methil no more
Irvine no more."

Today, we can add to that list, as the Tory party chants happily, "World cup no more; European championships no more; Hampden roar no more; Scotland football team no more."

Murdo Fraser: Finally, the member gives way.

I have no particular view on whether Scotland should be part of a Great Britain football team at the Olympics. Does Mr Maxwell accept the advice of FIFA president Sepp Blatter who, when asked about that scenario, said:

"The four British associations will not lose the rights and privileges acquired back in 1947."

Stewart Maxwell: The so-called guarantee from Sepp Blatter is not worth the paper that it is not written on. The fact is that he cannot bind FIFA or its future presidents.

Why do our opponents in the chamber want continually to give succour to those who want to see an end to the Scottish team? If they assist in making that happen, they will not be forgiven.

Sporting events make a significant contribution to the life of this nation. We are all excited and enthused when a Scottish team competes on the international stage. Our athletes are ambassadors for our nation on that stage and a source of pride for us all. They are also a source of inspiration for those who dream of following in their footsteps.

We must support our elite athletes and our sporting grass roots and defend our international football team. This Government will always put Scotland's interests first.

We all have dreams, and all dreams are possible for those who believe in what they do and who are not afraid to give it all that they have.

Our duty is to ensure that the children of today have the opportunity to develop their talent to become our champions of tomorrow, whatever the arena—Olympic, Commonwealth, European, national, regional, local, school or club. We must not allow a runaway London Olympics to prejudice the chances of our champions of tomorrow.

I move amendment S3M-204.3, to leave out from "and believes that" to end and insert:

"notes with considerable concern the negative impact that the spiralling costs of the subsequent Olympic Games is projected to have on lottery support for grassroots sport throughout the United Kingdom; supports the Scottish Football Association and the Tartan Army in their opposition to the proposal for a British football team to take part in the 2008 and 2012 games, and agrees that such a proposal could damage the continuation of a separate Scottish international football team."

09:28

Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): I am tempted to say to Stewart Maxwell, in the memorable words spoken by Gerry McNee after he listened to someone on the phone rambling about a sports issue, "What's your point, caller?" I am confused and bemused by the minister's speech. Perhaps he needs some performance training before he comes back to the chamber.

I am grateful for the support for my amendment, which highlights the critical importance of the Paralympics and the issue of access. We acknowledge the record of the previous Executive in being ambitious for Scotland and supporting Glasgow in its bid for the Commonwealth games.

It is a matter of regret that the first debate on sport this session has to be on the issue of a Scottish Olympic team. Although the debate is on a Tory motion, it is of the SNP's making, given that Mr Salmond claims to want a Scottish Olympic team, although he is remarkably invisible today—he was not present during the minister's confused speech.

We need to be clear about why what we decide today is important. We must challenge the SNP's

wish to continue to pursue the notion of a Scottish Olympic team. It is not supported by sportspeople or commentators throughout the country and it would waste time and money. As our amendment highlights, we should focus on promoting sport at all levels and producing top-rate athletes.

We know that there is real joy in sport. My 12-year-old daughter is a swimmer who loves her Glasgow swim team. She and her pals at the pool were hugely affected when they heard about Caitlin McClatchey's success in the Commonwealth games. My daughter was also inspired by Kelly Holmes winning gold for the GB team, and at the weekend she was blown away by the unbelievable quality of the Chinese badminton players who were performing in Glasgow. Sport can be about our being proud of athletes who represent us, but it transcends that and speaks to our awe at the immense capacity of sportspeople to stretch beyond the limits of their ability, physical strength and endurance and achieve great things. We should consider sport in that context, rather than in the context set by the SNP Administration.

It is disappointing that the Administration cannot meet the reasonable expectation that sportspeople and their needs should be considered in their own right, rather than being used as a proxy for a debate about independence.

We know the figures for the funding of the Olympics and Paralympics. We know that Scottish athletes would achieve fewer medals on their own and that the costs of a separate Scottish team would be significant. At the heart of the debate is the evidence that shows that no Scottish athlete, having met the qualifying standard, has not competed at the Olympics because their place has been taken by an athlete from another home country.

Logical debate tells us that we should support the motion. The charge laid at the door of the SNP Administration is that the debate about the Olympics and Paralympics is not about sport at all. Stewart Maxwell rambled on about the Scottish football team. He said something different last week when I challenged him to resist the temptation to use sport as a proxy for a debate on independence. His response confirmed the fears of many that the issue of a Scottish Olympic team is about, as he said, showing that the First Minister "has great ambitions not only for our country but for our sporting bodies and sporting stars."

Therefore, the debate is really about the SNP knowing best and being ambitious for our country, whereas

"The lack of ambition from the Labour Party is really quite astonishing." —[*Official Report*, 14 June 2007; c757.]

To suggest that I lack ambition is one thing, but is our freshly painted young minister for sport really

saying that Doug Gillon, the respected sports commentator, Chris Hoy, Lee McConnell and every Scottish sports person who is committed to the GB team and is striving to go beyond his or her own limits of endurance and capacity is all unambitious for Scotland, but that the SNP can speak for them? That is a monumental insult.

The same thread runs right through the SNP's position. The SNP says that we cannot be patriotic and remain part of the United Kingdom. The SNP is making a transitional demand—it knows that there cannot be a Scottish Olympic team unless we have independence, so it is asking a question while being sure of the answer. The SNP position is a disgrace and an irrelevance and is illogical and irrational. At decision time, all members should take seriously their responsibilities to support sport and sportspeople and should refuse to allow the SNP to use them to serve an entirely different agenda. I urge members to support our amendment and the motion in the name of Murdo Fraser.

I move amendment S3M-204.1, to leave out from "and believes" to end and insert:

"and Paralympics; believes that the interests of sport in Scotland and our athletes are best served if they compete as part of the British team in the 2008 Olympic Games and Paralympic Games and at subsequent Olympic Games and Paralympic Games, and further urges the Scottish Executive to work with all the relevant sporting agencies and organisations to maximise the opportunities for young Scots to benefit from UK Sport World Class Performance programmes."

09:33

Nicol Stephen (Aberdeen South) (LD): I am pleased to speak to the amendment in my name. I offer the support of my party for Glasgow's bid for the 2014 Commonwealth games.

I believe firmly that sport is vital to Scotland's future, particularly for our young people. There is an opportunity today to send a powerful message to the UK Government about its role in preparing for the 2012 Olympics.

We support strongly the Olympics coming to London in 2012 and acknowledge the benefits of being part of the host country. We believe that, as our leading sportsmen and sportswomen have made clear, Scotland's athletes should be part of the British team. However, we are also prepared to raise concerns when Government action threatens sport in Scotland.

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport made a statement to the House of Commons on 15 March in which she outlined big problems in the funding of the Olympics and announced that costs has risen by more than £5 billion. Part of her remedy was to announce that the national lottery would be expected to

contribute a further £675 million to the Olympic cause in addition to the £400 million that has already been taken from the lottery for the Olympics.

Subsequent parliamentary questions have uncovered the seriously bad news for Scotland as a result of that announcement. First, there has been a £1 million cut per constituency in funding from the Big Lottery Fund—funding that has been used in Scotland to encourage sport and community activities, such as rowing, skiing, cycling and dance. On top of that, there have been specific cuts in Scottish sporting activity. SportsScotland will lose more than £13 million in lottery support.

If members agree to my amendment, we will not be the first to complain. Earlier this year, the secretary of state was warned by the House of Commons Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport, which said that diverting lottery funds to the Olympics could cause programmes outside London to suffer, particularly sports that are not part of the Olympics, and that the ability to promote grass-roots sport throughout the UK would be reduced.

There have been developments since then. Figures that were released last week showed that lottery receipts, including receipts from new lottery initiatives that are specifically targeted on Olympic fund raising, rocketed up in March. That was good news. Ticket sales were booming even while the secretary of state was on her feet—in fact, sales were £70 million higher in March than they were in February. That raises a question about whether the full hit on the Big Lottery Fund will now be needed. The secretary of state now has more resources available than she initially thought. At the end of last week, I wrote to her to ask that she reconsider the resources that she proposes to take from grass-roots sports and community activities in Scotland and to reduce the imposed contribution from the remaining lottery projects. Indeed, it seems possible that that contribution will no longer be necessary. In short, I asked her to make certain that the Olympics are not funded at the cost of Scottish sport and other community projects.

In the autumn, members of Parliament at Westminster will have an opportunity to vote against the unnecessary Olympic raid on the lottery. If we agree to my amendment, we will send a message that we want grass-roots sport to develop in Scotland as a result of the Olympics; that we want investment in community activities and participation to grow; and that we want more investment throughout the UK, including in Scotland, in sport and our young people. That should be the legacy of the Olympics in the UK—not cuts in sport in Scotland.

I move amendment S3M-204.2, to insert at end:

“including the 2012 London Olympics, but regrets that the UK Government’s insistence on using lottery funds to finance the Games will deprive grassroots sport development in Scotland of essential funding and urges the UK Government to make a commitment that no further raids will be made on lottery funds to make up any additional Olympic budget shortfall.”

The Presiding Officer: We now move to the open debate. Speeches should be kept to a tight four minutes, please.

09:38

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP):

I am delighted to speak in a debate on a subject in which I have long had an interest. On 28 September 2000, I asked an oral question on whether the then Scottish Executive would support a Scottish Olympic team; I followed that up by lodging motions on 6 October 2000, 16 October 2000 and 25 February 2002. At the time, the unionist forelock tuggers were in government; now they whine from the Opposition benches. Today, we have heard from them just another version of the north British cringe.

It would be preposterous for a party such as the SNP, which supports the re-emergence of Scotland as an independent sovereign state, not to support having an independent Olympic team. At least our position is consistent. The unionist parties say that we are too wee, too lacking in talent and too inept to inspire, encourage and nurture our own champions and compete on an equal basis with the best in the world. The Tories and their north British allies show a total lack of faith in the Scottish people. They have lodged a motion and amendments that are designed to dull Scottish sporting ambitions and national self-belief. It is lucky that our forebears had a little more gumption; if they had not, there would be no national football or rugby teams. If Scotland had not been instrumental in spreading world football and had not joined bodies such as FIFA decades ago, the parties that oppose having a Scottish national team competing in the Olympics would no doubt now oppose our national football team. Scotland has not won a world cup yet, but Uruguay—the population of which is half the size of ours—has won two world cups and 14 South American championships, which inspires hope. If things were up to the Opposition parties and they could turn back the clock, we would not even be competing, albeit that we would, of course, have the opportunity to show our excitement at getting a Scot on the bench for some big game at Wembley once in a blue moon.

Non-independent nations, protectorates and semi-autonomous island groups ranging from Palestine to the Netherlands Antilles and Puerto

Rico have Olympic teams, so why should Scotland not have one? Perhaps some members believe that Palestine could best be represented as part of the Israeli national team.

What about the Great British Olympic team? Historically, the group of nations that comprises the UK has collectively performed remarkably poorly over 111 years. Great Britain ranks 30th, which is well below Australia, for example, the population of which is a third of the population of the UK—Australia's population was proportionately even smaller in the past. Finland, Norway and the Netherlands have done much better than larger countries, not only on a per capita basis, but on an absolute basis because health, sport and fitness are given a much higher priority in those countries than they are in the UK. Australia has 1,500 Olympic-sized swimming pools; the UK has eight. It is therefore all the more remarkable that Scottish swimmers won six gold medals as part of a Scottish Commonwealth games team. However, that five of them had to train in England is shocking.

Of course, when Scots succeed at the Olympic level, others take the credit. Who can forget that when the all-Scottish female curling team who went on to win gold in the 2002 winter Olympics was struggling, the commentator said:

"It looks like a British success is becoming a Scottish failure"?

An independent Scotland will not neglect sport—nor will the Scottish Government, which is committed to securing the 2014 Commonwealth games and the 2016 European football championships.

The pressure on Scotland and Wales to join a British team for the Beijing and London Olympics can only threaten the ability of Scotland's football team to compete independently on the world stage. The wolves at FIFA are circling. It is to the credit of the Scottish Football Association and the Football Association of Wales that they have rejected overtures to contribute to British teams in 2008 and 2012. They're no so daft.

We need a Scottish Olympic team for Scottish sport truly to flower. I urge members to support the amendment that was lodged by the Minister for Communities and Sport.

09:42

Mr Frank McAveety (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab): Kenny Gibson has once again fallen at the final hurdle. He mentioned the new Olympic sport of forelock tugging. SNP members obviously look forward to that sport being part of its bid for a new Scottish Olympic team.

I thank the Presiding Officer for giving me the chance to speak and I welcome this debate, which the Conservative group secured. However, I again despair at the desperate negativity of the SNP's amendment. SNP members are in their element today, blustering and showing all their negativity.

The debate is about our ambitions for sport in Scotland. We have heard about what our sportspeople have said—Murdo Fraser said that most of our major sportsmen and sportswomen are in favour of being members of a British team where that is appropriate. Scottish footballers think that having a Scottish football team is appropriate. Things depend on how the sport is best organised—I am thinking about world and European organisation and the Ryder cup, for example. We should try to maximise opportunities for our sportsmen and sportswomen. That strikes me as being good sense, as opposed to the nonsense that we have heard from the SNP.

Rather than debating the central point of the discussion, the SNP threw in a straw man—it asked what will happen to the Scottish football team. Labour members and other members have ambitions for the Scottish football team, and it should not be said that we have less ambition than Stewart Maxwell, who, as an SNP member, has a political position to uphold and claims that he has the interests of Scottish football more at heart than other members.

Stewart Maxwell: Will the member take an intervention?

Mr McAveety: No. The member did not take interventions, and I have only four minutes.

The fundamental point is that our sportspeople should take part at the appropriate level. The IOC and other governing bodies—not nation states—set standards for sportspeople. The bar against which sportspeople will be measured is not set in this debate by politicians in the Scottish Parliament or by the First Minister in his response to a question a few weeks ago.

We have other ambitions. For example, how can we use sport to ensure that opportunities are given to communities throughout the UK? We should consider the big events that have taken place or that will take place—in Manchester in 2002, in London in 2012 and, if the bid is successful, in Glasgow in 2014. Those cities have considered how such events could make a real difference to them and their communities.

It is obvious that the east end areas in those cities have been particular beneficiaries. Already development work is taking place in London in preparation for 2012. We have retained the ambition of the previous Labour-led Executive to use the 2014 bid and the development of our national facilities imaginatively to do what we can

through sport. As the elected member for the east end of Glasgow, I note the commitment to a national arena. I hope, too, that we will have a national velodrome and new swimming facilities as well as the games village at Dalmarnock. The other key element that the current Executive has dithered about is whether the headquarters of our national sports agency should be part of that fuller development. There is uncertainty for staff, the council and the community.

There has been a signal for change. What I want from the Executive, rather than indecisiveness and bluster, is a commitment to ensure that we maximise the opportunity offered by the 2014 bid to benefit the most disadvantaged communities in Scotland. It is time—a great phrase that I heard recently—for action, not animosity; it is time for leadership, not indecisiveness; and it is time for the Executive to raise its game.

09:46

Jackson Carlaw (West of Scotland) (Con): This is my first rotten-fruit-and-vegetables debate. The Tory motion is not difficult to support—as was the intention—and it would not benefit from the opportunist and somewhat spurious SNP amendment. That any controversy is attached to the motion is due entirely to the laboured and fevered machinations of the Executive, led lamentably on this occasion by the First Minister, who has been cheered on with some bluster from the sidelines by Kenny Gibson—at least one member of the First Minister's team is prepared to support him.

It might come as a big surprise to the SNP that we have all got its central message: we know that it seeks to bring about an independent Scotland. However, it is pretty depressing to see the First Minister make a torturous intervention to propose that the view that Scotland should be excluded from the United Kingdom Olympic team in 2012—a team in which it has competed happily and successfully in the modern era—is unanimously held.

Whom has he consulted? On his flying visit to Northern Ireland or in planning his trip to Wales, did he discuss the implications of the move for those countries? Were Scotland to withdraw, the other teams would have to represent the United Kingdom (excluding Scotland), the partially United Kingdom or the untied Kingdom. Or would the Wales and Northern Ireland teams be obliged to stand alone and compete by themselves as separate nations even though they have expressed no desire or ambition to do so? Was the matter discussed in Ulster and has the phone yet rung in Wales, or has the First Minister, without thought for Scotland's reputation, just shot from

the hip with no regard for the practical consequences for anyone else?

It is clear that the reservations that Scottish athletes—whose views ought to figure prominently in the debate—have expressed about their access to sound finance, training with peers and the competitive buzz of being in the UK team would be as nothing compared to those of Welsh and Irish athletes, whose athletic futures are equally prejudiced by this discordant wheeze of the First Minister.

Let us hear no more of it. Were Scotland ever to become independent, issues inevitably would follow that constitutional change. However, let us not forget that, even now, 75 per cent of Scots have no such shared interest with the First Minister.

Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind): I apologise for being late—I had to go back home this morning.

The member referred to the athletes. Although he is a lot younger than I am, does he recall that most Scots who have won Olympic medals have sought to distinguish themselves in some way as Scots? For example, Bobby McGregor wore a tartan towel, and Ian Black and Elenor Gordon also distinguished themselves as Scottish. Does that not indicate something?

Jackson Carlaw: I happily wear a saltire T-shirt when I am on holiday abroad, but it does not mean that I am any less proud to be British. That was a ridiculous point to make.

The Olympics should not be manipulated cynically to bring about a constitutional change. People in Scotland and, I suspect, even many of the SNP's supporters have no desire to see a great and hugely anticipated forthcoming national event hijacked by student union politics. The SNP now holds high office and should act accordingly. Or is it, as Murdo Fraser suggested, that today's SNP amendment disguises the front bench's abandonment of its policy, notwithstanding that the First Minister thought the Olympic team the most urgent matter to pronounce upon on television during his first weekend on the job?

Whatever ministers' posturing on the Olympics, surely we are all united in our desire to see Glasgow secure the 2014 Commonwealth games, with a bid that has been lauded as "truly impressive". I hope that we build on the momentum of a successful Olympic games to inspire, now and in the two years leading up to 2014—indeed as a lasting legacy in the years thereafter—a generation of children to abandon their PlayStation 2 or 3, their addiction to RuneScape, YouTube and "Big Brother" and get outside and be active.

I refer members to the lottery issue that the SNP raised—let us not give the impression, as the SNP amendment and comments do, that more active participation in sport is wholly conditional on lottery funding. I hope that the games encourage youngsters into public parks, local tennis courts, football pitches and local sports facilities. In addition, a Commonwealth games in Glasgow will act as a catalyst for much else that can only benefit the city and address in part the social and lifestyle difficulties. A modern games will bring tremendous investment, regeneration and employment.

Athletes in Scotland are supported by parties on all sides as unionists. When it comes to the 2012 games, it is as United Kingdom athletes that Scots will compete and win.

09:50

Iain Smith (North East Fife) (LD): This is a landmark debate—we have seen the end of the cuddly nationalism that we saw throughout the election and have seen so far this session. We are back to the true face of nationalism today, as demonstrated in the rather disappointing speeches by Stewart Maxwell and Kenny Gibson. I am particularly disappointed in the minister's contribution. One would have expected in such a debate that he would take the opportunity to tell us what the new SNP Administration will do to develop Scottish sport. Perhaps he could have told us something about how we will invest in grass-roots sport or what we will do for sports in school—but no, we just got a disappointing and rather ill-informed rant about the possibility of having a UK football team in the Olympics.

Brian Adam (Aberdeen North) (SNP): How does Iain Smith feel about having such a football team?

Iain Smith: I will come to that in a moment. The minister's speech showed a paucity of ambition for Scottish athletes. The SNP seems to think that Scottish athletes cannot compete on a UK stage and that somehow we need to be in a bubble on our own in order to qualify to compete in the Olympics. That SNP position is rather poor and disappointing.

I do not want a UK select football team to compete in the Olympics; there might be another way forward that nobody has considered yet. Why do we not have a home nations tournament, the winner of which goes on to represent the United Kingdom in the Olympics? That is another option that could be considered. I see no reason to have a UK select team in the Olympics. I do not support the idea and I never have.

Brian Adam: In that case, does the member suggest that a Scottish national football team

should compete in a qualifying tournament for the Olympics?

Iain Smith: If Scotland were to beat the other home nation teams in that tournament, the Scottish team would represent the United Kingdom at the Olympics. My suggestion is worth examining, although I am not saying that it would work.

I am happy to support a British team in the Olympic and Paralympic games. I am equally happy to support Scotland—the Scottish football and rugby teams, for example—in the Commonwealth games. I also support Europe, as others have mentioned, in competitions such as the Ryder cup. I have to confess that I even support England in cricket, unless Scotland is playing against the English team.

It is important to recognise that there are different levels of support. I always support my local teams and competitors first. I will be cheering on and hoping that people from North East Fife, such as Nony Mordi and Andrew Lemoncello, qualify for the Olympic games in Beijing, the Commonwealth games in New Delhi, the Olympics in London and the Commonwealth games in Glasgow. I hope that Nony Mordi and Andrew Lemoncello will represent the United Kingdom in those games.

It is fantastic that the greatest sporting event in the world is coming to Britain in 2012. It gives us a great opportunity in Scotland to develop our sport and our interest in it, as Jackson Carlaw rightly said. I remember that when I was a kid more people played tennis in Wimbledon fortnight than at any other time in the year. Sporting events such as that encourage people to get involved and active, and the Olympics offers that opportunity. I support the Glasgow bid to hold the 2014 Commonwealth games for similar reasons.

However, it is important that we ensure that the games—the Olympic games in particular—do not take money away from our grass-roots sports. If there is no investment in or development of grass-roots sport, from where will the elite athletes who will compete in future games come? We have to develop the grass roots in order to find the elite athletes. It is important that we ensure that the UK Government starts to manage the Olympic games properly in a way that does not require lottery funding to be withdrawn from important sports facilities here and in the rest of the United Kingdom. Lottery money should be used to develop facilities that can benefit sport in the long term and not—as appears to be happening—to subsidise regeneration and infrastructure projects in London.

I am happy to support the amendment in Nicol Stephen's name.

09:55

Stuart McMillan (West of Scotland) (SNP): I congratulate Murdo Fraser on lodging an interesting motion that is positive and negative at the same time. Up to the reference to the 2008 Beijing Olympics, the motion is positive and I cannot fault it. I also realise that holding the Commonwealth games in Glasgow would be good for Glasgow and Scotland. It is unfortunate that the same tired old attitude that has held Scotland back for generations comes to the fore in the remainder of the motion. I respect the fact that every party in the Parliament has its own agenda. The Conservatives are not afraid to show their unionist credentials in their official title.

It is fortunate that I see Scotland as having more confidence in itself and as able to represent itself as a normal independent nation that participates in world events. Even though I am yet another Scottish nationalist who is England born, I consider myself to be Scottish and I cannot for the life of me see why stifling Scots' ambition is a core belief of the unionist parties.

Anyway, I return to the motion, which is just an appetiser to sweeten Scotland to back the 2012 London Olympics. Its purpose is to get Scots to back losing millions of pounds of lottery money that would have been spent on projects in every constituency and region. Probably more sinister, its purpose is also to get rid of the world-famous, peaceful and party-loving tartan army by jeopardising the Scottish national football team's future. Members should make no mistake: if a football team GB is at the London Olympics, the Scottish Football Association can pack its bags and enjoy retirement. [*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Order.

Stuart McMillan: I realise that Scottish football is too bureaucratic, but abolishing the SFA is not the way forward. I do not know whether the Tories want to rid us of the SFA or whether they just do not realise the by-product of their wishes, but that is where we will head if a football team GB takes to the park.

The London Olympics are spiralling out of control. In March, Tessa Jowell announced the financial estimates for the Olympics of £5.3 billion to cover building venues and infrastructure, £1.7 billion to cover the wider regeneration of the Lea valley area, £2.7 billion for the additional contingency fund, £600 million for security and policing, £800 million for VAT and £400 million for elite sport and Paralympic funding. The total is a massive £9.345 billion. Added to those costs is the cost of staging the Olympic games, which is estimated at £2 billion. Thankfully, that is to be met by the private sector.

It is distasteful in the extreme that lottery funding is to be used to subsidise a project that clearly will never break even, never mind make a profit. Given the funnelling of lottery money from Scotland to an event in London that will have few tangible benefits for Scotland, I must ask why we Scots must help to subsidise the event. When voluntary groups and charities come knocking on the door of and lobby every MSP for more resources because their lottery funding has been slashed, what will members say?

I was delighted that England hosted Euro 96 successfully, although the competition was frustrating yet again for Scotland. I sincerely wish the London Olympics every success, and I will cheer on individuals to win, as I have done for many years, not because of their nationality but because of their talent and personality. I will obviously make an exception for Scottish team members, who will be resplendent with the saltire on their competing attire. However, the London Olympics cannot be supported at all costs.

I mentioned the SFA and the tartan army. As a foot-soldier myself, I will never support a football team GB. I am Scottish and I want Scotland to compete on the world stage. Even if a team GB were for under-23s only, it would not stop the Union of European Football Associations and FIFA arguing for one British team at every future tournament. Who could blame them? The precedent would have been set. Members should make no mistake: a football team GB would be the first step to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland losing their football independence and being subsumed by the English Football Association. It would also be the first step to Scottish football becoming a backwater, as the money would dry up and even fewer kids would have the chance of making the grade at the highest level.

In 1908, when the Olympics were first held in London, Scotland competed in its own right. Why cannot that happen again in 2012? I urge the Parliament to back Stewart Maxwell's amendment.

09:59

Ross Finnie (West of Scotland) (LD): The debate has been interesting, if not entirely unpredictable from the moment it started. However, I was grateful that Murdo Fraser sought to achieve consensus in the chamber and that he set a different tone from that which Stewart Maxwell set.

Liberal Democrats are absolutely behind a British Olympic team. It is interesting that SNP politicians claim that, without an independent team, competitors cannot be Scottish. I reject that allegation. Margo MacDonald made the point that many Scots athletes make it clear that, although

they are part of a British team, they are Scottish. To suggest that Allan Wells, Lee McConnell, Shirley Robertson and Chris Hoy are somehow not Scottish because they have participated in a British team is absolute nonsense.

Stewart Maxwell: We did not say that.

Ross Finnie: I say to Stewart Maxwell that I held the Tory motion up to the light and I know that it says nothing about not having a Scottish football team, so I am prepared to dismiss such sedentary interventions.

In the limited time that is available to me, I make the point that Liberal Democrats do not, as Jackson Carlaw suggested, wish to exaggerate the lottery funding issue or to say that it is the only issue, but it is interesting. If we are concerned to celebrate the Olympic games in this country, part of that celebration must be the fact that the Olympics will inspire many of our youngsters, as Johann Lamont said. We want that because, for the nation's health, we wish to promote far more participation in sport. It would be a tragedy if those who were inspired by having the Olympic games in this country in 2012 were somewhat limited in their ambition because the necessary infrastructure was inhibited by the diversion of lottery funds.

Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP): Within the past three years, I staged a members' business debate on the Olympics, at which I remember no Liberal Democrat being present. What did Liberal Democrat ministers do about the issue when they were in government and had the chance to do something?

Ross Finnie: There is no doubt that one of the few people who are on the record as complaining about lottery funding is my friend Nicol Stephen. I am sorry that Alex Neil's memory has failed him in that regard. That is not typical of him, but he occasionally gets things wrong.

Liberal Democrats had a quick look at the spread of lottery funding. We managed to find statistics only for the most recent round of awards north of the central belt, in which grants were made to Buckie, Forres, Thurso, Kyleakin, Oban and St Andrews. Those grants are important. No doubt it is the same down south. In fact, 6.3 million participants across 49 sports have benefited from lottery funding.

If we are genuinely to enjoy participating in and success at the Olympics in 2012, I repeat that it is critical that the people to whom Johann Lamont referred are inspired and able to participate in sport. That would not only make the Olympics a greater success but go a long way to improving the nation's health. I hope that members will support Nicol Stephen's amendment.

10:03

Johann Lamont: I shall attempt to be more temperate than I was in my opening speech, although the debate has been less temperate than I had expected.

I will flag up several issues. I acknowledge the concerns about national lottery funding, but those concerns are shared across parties—the same parties that supported at Westminster the London Olympic Games and Paralympic Games Act 2006 and supported using national lottery funding for the Olympics. The test is not only whether Scottish young people will benefit. Throughout the UK, youngsters are determined to benefit from the Olympics.

I acknowledge the funding issue, but it should not be the decisive factor in how members vote at 5 o'clock. I do not think that the Liberal Democrats and others who have raised the issue want to associate themselves with some of the more intemperate views of Alex Neil, for example, who showed hostility to his neighbours when he said that if London wants the Olympic games, it can pay for them. That reflects a different attitude from one of concern about national lottery funding.

Alex Neil: Will the member take an intervention?

Johann Lamont: No, thank you.

Alex Neil: It is only fair, as she mentioned me.

Johann Lamont: Well, fair enough.

Alex Neil: I thank the member for taking my intervention after some persuasion. How much is she prepared to forgo in lottery funding for good causes in Scotland in order to subsidise the London Olympics?

Johann Lamont: Alex Neil knows that that is a false division. He knows that, on that question, a commitment has been given to the voluntary sector at a UK level, which it has welcomed.

The core of this debate was exposed in Kenny Gibson's stunning speech, when he talked about the north-British cringe. He says that Scottish sportspeople are deluded and only think that the current approach is the best approach. He says that they are experiencing a north British cringe and only think that it would be better to go and work with their peers down in England. However, he knows better. The truth is that they are being driven down to England against their will. We should have more respect for the sportspeople of Scotland and acknowledge the fact that they and their groups and bodies have thought about the issue. I am proud of Caitlin McClatchey, and I was proud of Allan Wells when he ran in a British vest. That is not the north British cringe; it is recognising how we reveal our sporting talent.

I was disturbed to hear somebody boo when Iain Smith said that he might support the English cricket team. That kind of knee-jerk hostility is the antithesis of what we teach our young people on sports fields throughout Scotland. It is to be deprecated, not celebrated, and it is disturbing that the party of government in the Parliament would collude with that kind of attitude.

The issue relating to Scottish football is interesting and significant. Labour members have said that we will support the SFA in the position that it takes. However, we do not need to have a Scottish Olympic team just because of a perceived threat to the Scottish football team—that argument is illogical and irrelevant, and it is not worthy of the minister.

A Scottish Olympic team should be established as a consequence of a decision to go independent; it should not be used as a midwife to create the conditions for an independent Scotland, which is obviously the SNP's view.

At 5 o'clock, members must decide whether they wish to associate themselves with that kind of hostility towards our sportspeople or whether they want to put them at the centre of sporting achievement. We must reassert the importance to our Scottish sporting tradition of our sportspeople wanting to be part of a British team because of the personal achievement that that confers and because of what it does for young Scots and others throughout the UK.

I urge members to support our amendment, which, critically, recognises an event—the Paralympics—that the motion and other amendments do not mention and which is about providing access to and supporting a British Olympic team of which we can all be proud.

10:08

The Minister for Europe, External Affairs and Culture (Linda Fabiani): It is always a pleasure to follow a temperate Johann Lamont. She is one of the few members who makes Kenny Gibson look temperate at times.

We welcomed this debate and decided to address the terms of the Conservative motion, which is what we have done. We have looked at the overall position of Scotland in the sporting field and at how Scotland could be the best. We support the first part of the motion, which wishes the British team every success in the Beijing Olympics, but we do not believe that it is in the best interests of Scotland or Scottish sport for our sportspeople to be part of a GB team beyond then. There is a strong case for revitalising, inspiring and invigorating Scottish sport from the grass roots up by giving a sense—which we had in the Commonwealth games—that the participants are

competing for Scotland. That is not, however, to put down Scots athletes who take part in the British team.

Margo MacDonald: Does the minister agree that the notion of national teams competing at the Olympic games is somewhat old fashioned, given the number of international athletes who pick and choose which nationality they are going to adopt in order to get to the Olympic games?

Linda Fabiani: There is an element of that, but the fact is that it is national teams that enter the Olympic games. If we want to do the best for our sporting stars, that is what we must address.

Criticisms of the SNP's position have been more about diverting attention away from a worrying issue that the Liberal Democrats as well as the SNP have addressed—the loss of lottery funding. Stewart Maxwell addressed the matter directly. There are huge concerns about the amount of lottery money that is being used to support the staging of the 2012 games. Nicol Stephen outlined some of the figures. There has been a rise in projected costs of more than £5 billion, and £675 million is to be contributed from the national lottery, in addition to the £400 million that has already been taken from the Big Lottery Fund. There is no doubt that the few sports facilities that we have, along with some of our lottery projects, will be hammered by that. Labour members should wake up and smell the coffee—that is happening; it is not in doubt. That is what has been said at Westminster and here.

Frank McAveety spoke about desperate negativism. What we are hearing from the Labour benches is desperate denial of what is going on. However, the Scottish people are not in denial. They recognise the achievements that could be made by fully supporting our athletes. I think that Jackson Carlaw said that the Scottish people do not support the idea of a Scottish team, although I might have picked him up wrongly, because I have a vision of him on holiday wearing a saltire T-shirt, sandals and socks.

George Foulkes: Will the minister take an intervention?

Linda Fabiani: No, thank you.

A survey by the campaign for a Scottish Olympic team showed that 78 per cent of Scots support the creation of a Scottish Olympic team.

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

Johann Lamont: Will the minister take an intervention?

Linda Fabiani: No, thank you.

I suggest that that percentage would have been a lot higher if the poll had asked whether people

supported maintaining the integrity of a Scottish football team rather than allowing it to play as part of a British football team.

Patricia Ferguson: Will the minister give way?

Linda Fabiani: I am in my last minute, sorry.

I reckon that the support for that would be nearly 100 per cent and that the SFA and the tartan army would be backed all the way.

I ask members to consider the benefits that would be gained by supporting Stewart Maxwell's amendment to the Tory motion. They should sit down, think about it carefully and vote for what is best for Scotland.

10:13

Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): It gives me great pleasure to close the debate for the Scottish Conservatives and to support our motion. It has been an interesting and lively debate, and I will touch on a number of issues that have been raised.

Murdo Fraser made the point—let us be clear about this—that the SNP's desire to have a Scottish Olympic team is nothing to do with sport but is all about politics. At the SNP's annual conference in Perth on 11 October 2006, Alex Salmond repeated the SNP pledge to pull Scottish athletes out of their British Olympic teams. I wonder whether he asked any of those athletes first. Sadly, that shows the SNP at its worst: inward looking, narrow minded and petty—despite the fact that Stewart Maxwell knows the words of a Proclaimers song. I wonder whether the SNP has surveyed the opinions of Scotland's athletes and of sports' governing bodies, especially the Scottish Institute of Sport, which has done so much to secure medals for us, particularly in swimming. None of those experts wants to dilute the potential of team GB, which, through its collective strength, may even be able to challenge the might of teams such as the United States of America.

Margo MacDonald: Will the member give way?

Jamie McGrigor: Not at the moment.

We are inclined to agree with the cycling gold medal winner Chris Hoy, who said that a Scottish Olympic team would

"dilute the resources and expertise"

of the British team. We also agree with Simon Clegg, the chief executive of the British Olympic Association, who said:

"The British Olympic Association ... strongly believes that we are stronger collectively than as individual countries."

Alex Neil: Will the member give way?

Jamie McGrigor: Not at the moment.

In Athens, teams of mixed British nationalities worked together, as in the case of Shirley Robertson, the Scot who achieved the ultimate glory of an Olympic gold in sailing with her two English crew members Sarah Ayton and Sarah Webb. Incidentally, as with many Scots athletes, most of her training was carried out south of the border.

Alex Neil: Could it be that the people whom Jamie McGrigor quotes might be in the same position as the Tory party, which utterly opposed devolution, but whose members were crawling over each other to get into Parliament once it was created? Could it be that once Scotland has an Olympic team, they will want to join it?

Jamie McGrigor: I cannot envisage any member of this Parliament joining any Olympic team—especially not Alex Neil.

Different loyalties do not have to be divided loyalties, as Chris Hoy made clear when he said that

"You can be part of a Scottish team and part of a British team."

He is dead right. What is wrong with that? I acknowledge Kenny Gibson's commendable patriotism, but neither he nor the SNP has the monopoly on patriotism, even if they would like it. The saltire happens to be a symbol for every party in the Parliament and—if I may say so—it is the smartest and best part of the union flag.

The Conservatives have whole-heartedly supported Scottish sportsmen and sportswomen. We are thrilled by the recent successes of Scottish athletes and realise that success has been brought about by clever planning so, unlike the SNP, we do not want to change a winning formula. It has taken Scotland a long time to achieve such success and political distractions could easily upset an extremely delicate balance.

We recognise the value of sport—at both grass-roots and elite levels—in promoting good health, improving self-esteem and fostering a sense of community and teamwork. Successful Scottish athletes have enjoyed the best training facilities and coaching that the UK has to offer.

Margo MacDonald: Does the member agree that the issue is facilities rather than nationality? The best Scottish sprinters go where the best international sprinting coaches are, which is likely to be America. That is why Liz McColgan went to America. I am rather shocked by how narrow the debate is and by its failure to take account of the athletes and the facilities. The issue has nothing to do with nationality.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That is not an intervention.

Mr McGrigor, you are in your final minute.

Jamie McGrigor: As I have already pointed out, the athletes and the governing bodies all seem to want a British team, not a Scottish one.

I have an important question for the minister. If we had a separate team, would Scottish athletes continue to receive the investment that they receive at the moment, which we are led to believe is at least £100 million a year?

I turn to football. Of course the Scottish Conservatives believe in the integrity of the Scottish team—there is no doubt about that. I hope that the minister and other members will join me in congratulating the Scotland under-20 football squad, which will go to Canada for the under-20 world cup with the excellent coaches Tommy Wilson and Archie Gemmill a week on Sunday. In qualifying for the event, the Scotland under-20 team has done what many top European teams have not.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You should be winding up.

Jamie McGrigor: I liked Iain Smith's idea of having a youth football tournament, with the best home nations team representing the UK in the Olympics. I do not see anything wrong with that.

The SNP needs to raise its game a bit. It needs to get over its dogmatic and backward-looking view of the world, and to realise that Scottish sportspeople do not want a separate Scottish Olympic team.

Council Tax

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): The next item of business is a debate on motion S3M-201, in the name of Derek Brownlee, on council tax.

10:20

Derek Brownlee (South of Scotland) (Con): Our motion is straightforward. It does not say that the council tax is perfect, that it cannot be reformed or, indeed, that it cannot be replaced if a better alternative can be found. It says that the council tax should not be replaced by a local income tax.

I do not believe that there is in Parliament a majority who are in favour of a local income tax, although I guess we will find out soon enough. We know that the Scottish National Party supports a local income tax, at least in name, and that the Liberal Democrats have supported one for some time, but it is a proposal that has not been supported by the Conservatives, the Labour Party or the Green party in the past. By voting for the motion in my name, members have the opportunity to move the debate on. By rejecting a local income tax, we can focus on reform of the council tax—or on its replacement, if a better alternative can be found.

There are many proposals on how the council tax could be reformed or replaced. The Conservatives, for example, have proposed a discount for pensioners. Like other members, such as John Swinney, we recognise that too few pensioners take up the council tax benefit to which they are entitled. We can and should do everything we can to increase take-up, but our suggestion of a pensioner discount, which would not involve means testing but would, like the single person discount, be given automatically, would make a major difference to the lives of many pensioners in Scotland. It would be easy to understand, simple to implement and universal in application.

I was rather surprised to find that there was no SNP amendment to my motion. After reading today's *Scotsman*, I thought that Alex Neil might have lodged an amendment to promote a pensioner discount of his own.

Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP): If the member has read the article in question, he will have noticed that my proposal is not a substitute for a local income tax, but an interim measure. I suggested a cash—rather than a percentage—discount, which would be fair and progressive, unlike the Tory proposal, which would be unfair and regressive.

Derek Brownlee: I read today's *Scotsman* article, just as I watched with interest the member's performance on STV some weeks ago, during which he said that such a proposal would get the Government into the good books of pensioners. How right he was. We would be happy to explore any meaningful discount for pensioners, either with Mr Neil or with the ministerial team. After all, we have heard a great deal in Parliament's new session about the need for new politics, for party differences to be put on one side and for us to act together in the best interests of the country. In that spirit, I urge all SNP members not to reject out of hand the principle of a pensioner discount merely because it is supported by Alex Neil.

As well as contributing to the political life of the nation through articles in *The Scotsman* and appearances on television, Mr Neil has lodged a number of parliamentary questions. We await the answer to the one that he lodged today about the cost of his proposal. I note that he has asked a parliamentary question about ministers' pensions, but the one that really interests me is about the cost of a percentage discount for pensioners. The answer shows that it seems to be getting cheaper.

In a debate last year, when Mr Swinney was in opposition, he costed our proposal for a 50 per cent discount at £364 million a year. We disagreed with that costing. This year, in his response to Mr Neil—we disagree with some of the assumptions that he has used—he costed it at £286 million a year. We think that the real cost is about £200 million; I rather suspect that the cabinet secretary wishes that all the proposals that are being made to him were falling rather than rising in cost. It was interesting to note that in today's *Scotsman* article that Mr Neil is worried about whether the money would be available to fund a pensioner discount. It is nice to find that there is an SNP member who is concerned about having sound public finances. We believe that a pensioner discount is affordable and that all that is required is the political will.

I move on to the case for rejecting a local income tax. We know that the new Government wants to introduce a local income tax, but the SNP's proposal, although it is a tax, is neither genuinely local nor fully related to income. Serious problems are associated with a local income tax that could be varied by each local authority, because there would be 32 different rates and logistical difficulties in tracking people as they move across local authority boundaries. That may be one reason why the SNP has suggested a flat rate for all Scotland's local authorities. The proposal does not seem to have found favour with the Liberal Democrats: in a recent press release, Robert Brown called for a "genuinely local" local income tax. When the Liberal Democrats move their amendment, it will be interesting to hear

whether they would support a local income tax that involved the uniform application of one rate across Scotland.

Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): The member has highlighted the difficulties of having 32 different local income tax rates, but do we not already have 32 different council tax levels?

Derek Brownlee: The critical point is that the unit that is taxed under the council tax is property, which does not move, as opposed to people, who do.

The SNP's proposals do not represent a tax on income—they represent a tax on earnings, but not on interest income or dividend income. I do not believe that we should penalise those who have put money aside or who have invested in shares, and who live off the income that their savings generate. Equally, I do not understand why the SNP believes that it is fair to tax the majority of people who have not been able to save and must work to provide for their families, but not to tax people with exactly the same income who happen to receive that income from a different source.

A local income tax would not apply merely to earnings from employment because self-employed people would also pay it. There is some confusion about whether the new Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism really said during the election campaign that it would be naive to increase income tax in Scotland. If he did, it was naive of him to say that in the middle of an election campaign, but he was right. Scotland will not prosper if we tax our small and growing businesses more than their competitors in England are taxed. Parliament should not give businesses in Cumbria a competitive advantage over those in Dumfries and Galloway, any more than it should give businesses in Berwick an advantage over those in the Borders.

Today, Parliament can give Mr Mather and his colleagues the opportunity to drop plans to impose a local income tax on businesses large and small and can send a clear signal that whatever different views we may have on local taxation, we do not support a local income tax. We have the opportunity to move the debate forward.

I move,

That the Parliament does not support the introduction of a local income tax as a replacement for the council tax.

10:27

Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab): Labour is in agreement with the central thrust of the motion that is before us today. Maintenance of a property-based local tax system strikes a balance between different sources of

revenue. Approximately 80 per cent of the money that is spent by councils comes in the form of grant from central Government and from general taxation, principally from income tax. The fact that councils are required to raise the remaining 20 per cent themselves ensures that they are not simply agents of central Government but are accountable to the electorate for their decisions. Raising that revenue through a property-based tax system based on relativity among the values of domestic property ensures stability for local government services and the employees who deliver them. That is because council tax raises predictable revenues, is efficient to collect and is hard to evade. However it is also fairer, because the burden of paying for local services is shared among all those who use the services, with both assets and income being taken into account.

A move to a system based wholly on earnings would narrow the base of those who contribute in a way that would inevitably increase the burden on working families, in particular. The extent of that additional burden has been estimated at between 6.5 and 7.9 per cent, depending on how the tax burden is distributed between different tax bands. The nationalists' proposals are entirely dishonest, because they claim that a local income tax set at 3p in the pound would meet the needs of local government. That that is evidently not the case is the most fundamental criticism of the SNP's proposal, which promises pensioners that they can be taken out of paying for local services, while promising families that their share of the cost will increase only if their income exceeds £60,000 and promising council workers that their jobs will not be jeopardised by the change. All three of those statements will turn out to be untrue.

Other criticisms can be made. For example, it turns out that the SNP's local income tax would be nothing of the sort. The SNP is proposing a nationally set and collected system of taxation that would obliterate local democracy and leave every council entirely dependent on allocations from Mr Swinney. That is not a prospect that many of them or their electors will relish. Mr Swinney has made much of his desire to reduce the number of quangos and to give some of their responsibilities to local government, but if local government is emasculated and all its revenue and expenditure determined by Mr Swinney, the result will be increased central control, rather than more local autonomy.

Our amendment is aimed at securing greater honesty and transparency from the Government—a big task, I realise, but one must try. In its manifesto, the SNP said that it would introduce a freeze on council tax as part of its preparations to replace the tax with a new system. I hope that that means that significant additional resources will be handed over to local government, to ensure that

local services are protected and that my constituents and those of other members are not adversely affected. I want to know from ministers how much that will cost. Ministers can expect rigorous questioning, because the budgets of portfolios other than Mr Swinney's will have to stump up the money to meet this key manifesto commitment.

Even more important is that we must, before we embark on this journey, be clear about the destination. It is essential for the SNP to set out its intentions for the key policy commitment in its manifesto—one that featured on page 1 of every leaflet, immediately after the picture of Alex Salmond, the poster boy for man at C&A. It is not good enough for the SNP to put its flagship policy in the "too difficult" box, as has been acknowledged by Mr Neil, with his interim proposal. The SNP's full proposal for how it intends to replace the council tax with a "local" income tax must be brought before Parliament in the autumn, so that the scrutiny process can begin before local government finance is thrown into turmoil.

I am not saying that the present system is perfect. We, along with the Conservatives and other parties, recognise that there are problems with it, because of its impact on certain pensioner groups.

Mike Rumbles: Will the member acknowledge that the vast majority of people who pay their council tax do so out of their monthly income? The tax is not related to an asset that they cannot realise. A local income tax, which people could pay monthly, is the right solution.

Des McNulty: That was not a particularly profound or significant contribution. People pay their council tax, as they pay their income tax, out of their income. Pensioner contributions and the way in which the burden of council tax falls on particular groups of pensioners are issues. There is a significant debate that Parliament needs to have about whether that would best be dealt with by the Conservatives' proposal for the introduction of a pensioner rebate that would apply to all pensioners, by Labour's suggestion that the burden of water charges be relieved, or by altering the arrangements for rebates and tapering. However, the Government has brought forward no proposals for us to examine. We need to have those before we opt for a system that will significantly disadvantage local government and, through that, the people whom all of us represent. It is time for the Government to put up or shut up. If it has proposals, it should let us see them by the autumn.

I move amendment S3M-201.4, to insert at end:

“and further requires that any proposals for a new system should be published by Scottish Executive ministers before the Parliament considers Stage 2 of the 2008-09 budget process.”

10:34

Tavish Scott (Shetland) (LD): I welcome the opportunity to debate this important area of Liberal Democrat policy. I know that it comes as a surprise, given my disagreement with Mr Swinney on a number of transport projects, but I agree with him on this policy. I give clear notice that the Scottish Liberal Democrats will work with the SNP Government on the issue. Before the election we said that we would, and we will do so when proposals are brought forward. I agree with Mr McNulty on one point, however; it is incumbent on the Government to introduce proposals that should rightly be scrutinised. We look forward to playing a constructive role in that process.

Council tax is a burden on the most vulnerable people—pensioners, the average hard-working family and young people who are starting out on their careers. It is unfair and unfixable.

While the Conservatives and Labour are content to tinker at the edges—and remain so this morning—we seek a fair replacement that is based on the ability to pay. Under a local income tax, 70 per cent of households would be better off. The move would benefit the average family and take half a million pensioners out of paying local tax altogether.

Gavin Brown (Lothians) (Con): Will the member give way?

Tavish Scott: In a minute.

These are important areas on which to move forward. As Mr Brownlee fairly pointed out, today's debate is about the principle of progressive taxation. I acknowledge the Conservatives' opposition to that principle, but I must say that I have always been a little surprised that my former colleagues in the Labour Party have never supported the contention that an important element of our tax system should be progressive local taxation. I and the rest of the Liberal Democrats are very keen for Parliament to endorse the principle today.

Mr Brownlee and Mr McNulty have already given a lot of attention to our position, but they did not pay as much attention to the reality of their own alternatives. As they were put to the independent review of local government finance, Labour's rebanding proposal would result in half of households paying more and no one paying less. If Scotland keeps the council tax, it must be revalued at some point; after all, it cannot be

forever based on 1991 house prices. When the council tax was revalued in Wales, there was an average additional 10 per cent hike in tax. Indeed, during the election campaign, the Labour Party admitted that revaluation would have to happen. It is certainly implicit in its own policy; if it splits the top and bottom bands, it must revalue them. If it revalues those two bands, the logical conclusion is that it must revalue all of them. How could it make its proposals work otherwise?

The one argument that was advanced by Mr Brownlee that I might agree with is that, whatever system is introduced, it will have difficulties. Many of us who went through the Burt inquiry know all about that. In any case, it is very honest and brave of the Conservatives to make arguments for reform. After all, we remember their main reform in this area: Mrs Thatcher's Government introduced the poll tax some years ago, and it has not been that long since Michael Howard called it the fairest form of local taxation. Nothing in the proposals that have been outlined by the Conservatives would change that position. Even their proposed 50 per cent council tax rebate for pensioners fails to be fair. The Institute of Fiscal Studies has shown that, under such a measure, the poorest 10 per cent of pensioners would receive on average £185, while the richest 10 per cent would receive on average £470. Is that really fair? I suggest to Parliament that it is not.

We hope that that a majority in Parliament will vote to allow the Government to introduce proposals on a vital issue that affects every household in the country, and we look forward to a constructive debate on what should be an essential principle of any basic tax system.

I move amendment S3M-201.2, to leave out from “does not support” to end and insert:

“believes that local income tax, which is based on ability to pay, is a fairer system of local taxation than the discredited and unfair council tax and notes the position of the Green Party in regard to land value taxation.”

10:38

Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): Still in hope—and almost certainly not for the last time—I bring to the chamber the subject of land value taxation. On 30 January 2003, Parliament passed a motion to give further consideration to LVT. Only the Conservatives voted against it—although I should note that Labour, in a somewhat curmudgeonly mood, simply abstained. Although the Parliament and the Executive have not taken forward the spirit of the motion, Mark Ballard took LVT into his portfolio and, over the past four years, was able to present evidence to the Burt committee and to prepare a proposal for a bill.

The Burt committee came out comprehensively against both a local income tax and the council tax. Instead, it proposed a local property tax, but it also spent a considerable amount of time on LVT. Its response was pretty ambivalent; to be honest, I suppose that one could say that it was gently negative about the proposal, without undermining the case completely. However, on each of the seven criteria on which the inquiry decided to judge LVT—effect on behaviour, fairness, public understanding, financial effects on households, valuation issues, taxing the owner instead of the occupier and transitional issues—we can certainly argue fiercely for the tax and against the report's conclusions.

For example, the Burt report says:

"We understand that more than 700 cities worldwide apply a land value tax in some form, including cities in Australia, eastern Europe and the US State of Pennsylvania. However, it appears that the proportion of revenue coming from land taxes in Denmark"

and other countries seems to have dropped. Well, so what? The report goes on to say:

"Despite considerable evidence, there is no 'ideal' model in operation that we could identify."

So the committee rejected LVT because it could not pick an ideal model out of 700 examples. Perhaps we should reverse that position and instead highlight the fact that 700 cities have managed to construct a form of LVT that suits their own circumstances. The committees and the chamber should at least be able to have a full discussion about the possibility of constructing for Scotland, or—as in the United States—for our individual cities, our own Scottish version of LVT.

The Burt committee cast aspersions on the fairness of the tax. However, evidence based on comparisons with the council tax showed that, under our LVT model, people in the lowest bands would pay less and those in the highest would pay considerably more. One of the criticisms of council tax is that it is not fair; our version of LVT would be absolutely fair.

We believe that LVT promotes fairness, productivity, equity, convenience, democracy, enterprise, efficiency, precision, environmental sustainability and the avoidance of disputes. *[Interruption.]* An ex-minister is interrupting me from a sedentary position. Surely a tax that offers all those advantages should at least be considered by the Parliament.

I move amendment S3M-201.3, to insert at end:

"notes the decision, made by the Parliament on 30 January 2003 but never fulfilled, to consider and investigate land value taxation, and calls on the Scottish Government to fulfil this commitment before the introduction of legislation on the future of local government finance."

10:42

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): The Government has said consistently that it is committed to abolishing the unfair council tax as part of its agenda to create a wealthier and fairer Scotland. The council tax is undeniably unfair and regressive and hits people on low incomes, particularly pensioners and others on fixed incomes.

I note from the motion—and from Mr Brownlee's clear remarks—that its proponents have not said that council tax should be retained; they have simply said that it should not be replaced by a local income tax. I welcome the tacit acknowledgement both in the motion and in Mr Brownlee's speech that the council tax has had its day.

Derek Brownlee: Do I take it, then, that the SNP will support our motion at decision time?

John Swinney: I am delighted to say that—for the first time and, I hope, not for the last—I will vote enthusiastically for Mr Scott's amendment.

There are many arguments against the council tax. As I have said, it is regressive and attacks people on low incomes. Indeed, those who are on the lowest incomes pay about 5 per cent of their net income in council tax, while the richest pay about 2.5 per cent. The tax also severely penalises pensioners. Since 1996-97, there has been a 62 per cent increase in council tax, but pensions have increased only by 43 per cent. As a result, pensioners' incomes have been hugely hit.

During the election campaign, this Government proposed its alternative of a local income tax in response to our assessment of the council tax. I will say a little more about how we intend to take the matter forward, but I want to spend a moment on the Conservative and Labour proposals. The Conservatives would reduce council tax for all pensioners, including those who are well able to pay. Such a measure takes no account of ability to pay and therefore retains the council tax's inherent flaws. Indeed, I find it interesting that the Conservative motion does not advance the proposal for a pensioner discount.

As for the Labour Party's position, it would be generous to call it a total shambles. Before 2003, Labour told us that the council tax was unfair, and then it spent four years doing absolutely nothing about it. It told us to wait for the 2007 election campaign, when all would become clear. It proposed two new council tax bands, which would mean that 11,000 tax payers in band H would somehow pay for council tax reductions for 530,000 households in band A.

Providing a £100 reduction for half of those in band A would cost around £26.5 million, which is more than is raised from all band H tax payers. The Labour Party told us to wait for the answers and we waited for months, but its scheme hardly lasted the day on which it was announced during the election campaign.

The Government has exciting proposals to present on local taxation.

Des McNulty: When?

John Swinney: We will consult on detailed proposals later this year and I hope that Mr McNulty will support us when we present our proposals to Parliament. We will listen to the views of other parties, key stakeholders and the people of Scotland, who foot the bill.

Introducing a local income tax will take time, so we will take early steps to offer support to those who have suffered as they faced larger council tax bills each year. That is why we will do all we can to avoid council tax increases. Our aim is to deliver a freeze on council tax rates until that tax can be replaced by a fairer system.

To achieve that, we need a positive and productive relationship with local authorities in which we respect their primary role at local level, support their essential role in local governance, free them to exercise their responsibilities and establish the financial framework in which the tax freeze can take place. My energies are focused on that in order to relieve individuals in Scotland from the burden of council tax in the short term.

We stood for election on a platform of abolishing the unfair council tax. We are determined to deliver that in the lifetime of this parliamentary session and to honour our commitment to the people of Scotland. It is a sign of the times that I am pleased to support the amendment in the name of Tavish Scott.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the open debate. There will be four-minute speeches, which will be tight. I have already had to tell a member that he will not be called and I may have to tell another member the same thing. I call Margo MacDonald, to be followed by Bill Wilson. You have four minutes, Ms MacDonald.

10:46

Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind): I shall endeavour to be brief, Presiding Officer.

I have to tell members that Robin Harper's land value tax proposal is winning me over. However, I accept what he said, which is that this will not be the last time that we hear of his proposal in the chamber; I imagine that debate on it will be a long haul. The choice that I face today is whether to

vote for a local income tax that is not local, or for a reformed council tax that is not a reform.

I have not come to this question late in the day. I wrote to Alex Salmond during the election campaign and asked him about the Scottish National Party's policy on the replacement of the council tax, but he has not phoned and he has not written. I will, therefore, put my questions to John Swinney.

The SNP's proposed 3p tax rate would be set nationally and, according to the SNP's March statement, it would be collected through HM Revenue and Customs at Westminster. Does Mr Swinney have Westminster agreement on that? That is a straightforward question.

If money is to be allocated to a council according to the income that is raised from income tax payers in the council's area, what would be the financial position of those Scottish councils that have a low income-tax base because of the level of poverty in their areas? How would that problem be tackled? Can John Swinney provide examples of the expected tax yield from Edinburgh, for example, compared with the Western Isles or the Vale of Leven? That would give us a parameter for comparing benefits for different taxpayers.

How would a dispute be resolved between a council and HM Revenue and Customs about the accuracy of the figure for the amount of local income tax to be raised in a local authority area, given that employers hold the information on the place of abode of the LIT payers?

I foresee a great number of practical problems in what John Swinney is attempting to do, because he is attempting to make a silk purse out of a sow's ear. Without having at his disposal the full panoply of fiscal measures that could be applied by any Government in Scotland, he cannot successfully bolt on this brave attempt to bring in a fairer system of paying for council services.

It is important that we have straight answers to straight questions. Will Mr Swinney expect employers, particularly small business employers, to carry the additional administration costs for the proposed local income tax? Employers, not HM Revenue and Customs, are the actual gatherers of PAYE tax. That is another of the questions that I asked of Alex Salmond and which I now put to John Swinney and his team.

I regret that I cannot enthusiastically support the introduction of a local income tax, because, as I said, I do not believe that the proposed scheme is a local income tax. My vote will depend on whether I believe the putative payer of the local income tax will benefit. Has an estimate been made of the expected revenue? How would that revenue be redistributed? I think that that is the clincher.

The promise is that the council tax will be frozen for two years. What would happen if HM Revenue and Customs took longer than two years to work out a system for the proposed local income tax? The period of two years seems rather prescriptive given the history of HM Revenue and Customs, for example its handling of the tax credit system.

I apologise, Presiding Officer, for only asking questions, but time is short.

10:51

Bill Wilson (West of Scotland) (SNP): In developed countries, there is strong evidence that health differences reflect differences in wealth—that is, in the degree of income inequality. Bluntly, the relatively poor die younger. Like smoking, regressive taxation kills. However, it is not just health that is affected by income inequality. The report by Jackson and Segal highlighted the range of ills that a society such as the United Kingdom, with an unequal division of wealth, can expect.

Today, we have the opportunity to build a new consensus on taxation. We have had the poll tax, which was the Tory solution for local taxation. Quite rightly, it sparked massive protest and, quite rightly, the Tory party likes to forget that deviation into unjust and unpopular taxation.

We followed that with the council tax. What can we say about that tax? Is it less unfair than the poll tax? Perhaps that is so, but it is hardly the crowning achievement of a taxation system. It is time for change—real change. The Tory party, having dabbled in reform and played with the poll tax, and having burned not only its fingers but its hands, arms and most of the rest of it, has now decided that it is better to tinker than to play. Thus, there is the cry from the Conservatives to reduce the tax bill of pensioners, which is a worthy aim. However, the Tory proposal would mean that the largest gainers would be the top 10 per cent of pensioners, who are also in the top 20 per cent of high-income households. The Tory proposal would hardly be a progressive tax.

Certainly, many poorer pensioners would receive help, but what about the poor in employment? What about those on the minimum wage? Around 25 per cent of Scotland's children live in poverty—the Conservative proposals would leave them in poverty. The Tory proposals are superficially attractive, but they would leave many of the poorest in our society out in the cold.

These are the days of consensus politics—so Alex Salmond told me—so I will finish my comments on Tory policy on a consensual, positive note. I warmly congratulate the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party, not on its name but on not attempting to reintroduce the poll tax.

Let me point to Sweden. That country has a local income tax and its gross domestic product figure is higher than that of Scotland. It also has lower crime rates than Scotland and has fairer distribution of income than we do. Have I mentioned that Sweden is independent?

A local income tax is based on the ability to pay and it is a fair and just tax. It would reduce the taxation burden on families living in poverty and help the 25 per cent of Scottish children who are raised in poverty. A local income tax would not end all society's ills or even improve the weather, but it would be a step in the correct direction. I am sure that some in the Labour Party still hold to its once-traditional values and believe in taxing people according to their means. I am sure that a few in the Labour Party still believe in progressive taxation.

How does one judge a civilised society? Are the criteria its education and health systems, and its humanity? I would add to that list its distribution of wealth. That is why I support a local income tax—progressive taxation for a progressive people.

10:54

Charlie Gordon (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab): I will take a leaf out of the SNP's book and say that this debate is about constitutional issues, above all. Local government has no constitutional status whatever in our country, which is wrong and must change. The role of locally elected councillors in determining levels of local taxation for local services is a fundamental aspect of a properly acknowledged constitutional role for local government in Scotland—it is what differentiates local government from local administration. Centrally determined local taxation is a contradiction in terms and is wrong in principle. The same argument applies to individual instances of hypothecation or so-called ring fencing.

Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): Will the member draw into his argument the fact that 80 per cent of current support for local government also comes from central Government taxation?

Charlie Gordon: Yes. That is a pity. The proportion was not always 80 per cent and need not remain so. Why not have stronger local government?

It is unfortunate that centralisers are well represented in the Parliament. I fear that John Swinney might be among them. In January last year, he advocated giving a £93 million windfall to councils, but only if they used the money to maintain council tax stability. I am not against council tax stability; there have been no above-inflation increases in council tax under Labour in Glasgow City Council for nine years, and I was council leader for six of those years. Council tax

stability was a key part of Scottish Labour's recent election manifesto. We were committed to ensuring council tax stability in Scotland for the next four years.

We acknowledged that many perceptions about excessive council tax rises are attributable to recent significant rises in water charges, which are perforce collected alongside the council tax by councils. That is why Labour's manifesto proposed to phase out water charges for pensioners.

We should not give John Swinney the power to set a new national tax at 3p in the pound for council services—the real cost would be 5p in the pound. John Swinney is already famously burdened with 38 ministerial responsibilities. I was relieved to learn that he had recently given up his paper round and I know that he is assisted by Stewart Stevenson's encyclopaedic knowledge and Jim Mather's fiscal fairy dust, but no one politician should be given so much power.

The Liberal Democrats' proposed local income tax would at least be local, but the administration of 32 different rates would be an unaffordable nightmare for employers.

Let us get council tax reform in perspective. According to the Scottish Parliament information centre, the average band D council tax rise during the past 11 years has been 15.5 per cent cumulatively, in real terms, whereas house prices doubled in real terms between 2000 and 2005. I accept that the increased equity is a form of wealth that is not readily accessible by homeowners who are on fixed incomes.

Two major parties—and Alex Neil of the SNP, who has left the chamber; that is the first time that I have seen him run away from a fight—support putting in place measures that will address concerns quickly, but if members support independence for local government they should not support calls for a new income tax.

10:58

Keith Brown (Ochil) (SNP): My experience of local taxation, rather like that of Charlie Gordon, has been formed by my working in local government for nearly 20 years, by my being a councillor for 11 years and, before that, by my studies of local government finance. Whether I was a student of local government finance, a local government employee or a councillor—and, like Charlie Gordon, a council leader who had to propose council tax increases—it was always clear to me that a property-based tax such as the council tax is inefficient and unfair.

Council tax is now defended by new Labour—although perhaps not much by Charlie Gordon. Labour clings to the council tax with a tenacity that

it did not have even in relation to clause IV, which surprises me. If any member thinks that the reform that was proposed by the Labour Party during the election campaign was logical or coherent, they should use a spare night to watch the YouTube recording of Jack McConnell being interviewed by Bernard Ponsonby and try to find a rational and logical coherence to what Jack McConnell said.

The Tories, too, defend the council tax, but in speaking to a motion that is against local income tax they have acknowledged the failures and limits of the entirely discredited council tax. The fact that during the election campaign they described their proposed reforms to the council tax as radical shows how poor the tax is.

The fundamental limitation of council tax as opposed to local income tax is that it is not a buoyant tax. Do the two parties that still support the council tax also support a revaluation? They must do so, because that is the corollary of their position. Labour and the Tories should be up front and admit that we cannot have the council tax without a revaluation, which is long overdue, for political reasons.

Charlie Gordon knows as well as I do that local taxes have been used for far too long by the Conservatives and Labour to push through tax increases that the parties did not want to push through the income tax system. Local government and local government tax payers have paid for national policies that have been implemented by local government without being properly funded.

The real problem is that after the poll tax, which was a disgrace, there was no proper scrutiny of the council tax. People were so eager to get rid of the poll tax that they embraced the council tax too quickly.

The defining feature of a local income tax system is that it is fairer. People pay according to their ability to pay, as Bill Wilson said. The old nostrum, "from each according to their ability to pay" is useful in this context. A local income tax would also be cheaper to collect. It costs £65 million to collect the council tax, but it would cost around £25 million to collect a local income tax, according to the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy.

Margo MacDonald: Would that figure apply to what is proposed for Scotland, which would not be a local income tax and would miss out much of the local administration?

Keith Brown: The CIPFA figures do not go into that detail, but the system that we propose would be even cheaper to administer.

About half of pensioners fail to take up council tax benefit, which exacerbates the unfairness of the current system. Local income tax collection

rates are about 96 per cent on average, compared with around 93 per cent for the council tax.

Local government leaders are fed up to the back teeth with the prevarication in the Parliament, which reached its highest level of absurdity when the former First Minister rubbished a study that he had commissioned before it was even published. Local government finance is creaking at the seams, and people who are on limited incomes are struggling to pay their council tax, sometimes having to choose between paying the council tax and paying a heating bill. Many pensioners have an old-fashioned attitude and would far rather pay the bill that they have been sent than incur new expenditure, even when such expenditure might save their lives.

It is regrettable that at a time when change to local government taxation is desperately needed, the Tory motion does not advocate change. The Tories criticise the Government for not coming forward with proposals but have failed to include proposals of their own in the motion. I support the amendment in Tavish Scott's name.

11:03

David McLetchie (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con): The financing of local government has been one of the most contentious areas of political debate in this country during the past 30 years. During that time, we have moved from rates to the council tax, via the community charge. Alternative taxes have been proposed, such as the local income tax that is beloved of the Scottish National Party and the Liberal Democrats, and the land value tax that is passionately advocated by the Greens—in particular, by Robin Harper in his speech.

The former Scottish Executive instituted an inquiry into local government finance under the chairmanship of Sir Peter Burt. No doubt the partners in the now-dissolved partnership had different expectations about the outcome. Labour probably expected a series of recommendations for reform of the council tax, perhaps by the addition of bands or adjustment of the ratios between bands. The Liberal Democrats might have expected the Burt committee to endorse the concept of a local income tax, in a partial echo of the Layfield committee's recommendations in 1973, although it should be noted that Layfield favoured local income tax not as a substitute for rates but as a supplement to rates, with a view to increasing the proportion of local government expenditure that was met from locally raised taxes.

In the event, and no doubt much to the chagrin of both parties, the Burt committee refused to play ball and came up with an option of its own: a local property tax, levied as a percentage of the market

value of homes. As Keith Brown noted, the proposal drowned in a torrent of criticism and was comprehensively rubbished by the former First Minister's spin doctors before the ink on the report was dry. However, although the Burt committee found its proposal being quickly discarded by the then Executive, the committee's report performed a signal service in its measured demolition of the case for a local income tax. Many of the criticisms in the report were echoed in the perceptive questions that were posed by Margo MacDonald.

John Swinney: Has Mr McLetchie reflected on the fact that the Burt report also contained a measured rejection of the council tax?

David McLetchie: There were many criticisms of the council tax, but the council tax is the status quo and those who want to change it will have to advocate the case for change. The case for change was quite clearly demolished by Burt, and that is the essence of this morning's debate.

It is interesting to reflect on how quickly the debate has moved on. Burt has mortally wounded the whole concept of a local income tax and, even from people who support the idea, he has extracted an acknowledgement that any such system would take years to introduce and would require the whole-hearted co-operation of HM Revenue and Customs—co-operation that I feel would be very unlikely to be forthcoming.

In the meantime, we need to address deficiencies and weaknesses in the current system. It was the Conservatives who first proposed the introduction of a council tax discount back in 2005; we proposed it again at the recent Scottish Parliament election. The policy is attracting growing interest. Back in the summer of last year, it had the support of Bristow Muldoon, formerly the Labour MSP for Livingston. Furthermore, Alex Neil of the SNP—never a man to let a good idea pass him by without trying to claim it as his own—has this week echoed the Conservative view that a council tax discount for pensioners should be introduced by the Executive.

The form of the discount—whether a percentage or a flat rate—and its level are matters for debate. The question of affordability will also have to be considered in the context of the overall budget. However, members should be in no doubt that we on this side of the chamber welcome Alex Neil and others as recruits to our campaign on behalf of Scotland's pensioners. We look forward to Alex Neil being joined by more of his colleagues in the SNP and to the introduction of a discount scheme by the Government. We welcome their support and the support of other parties.

Modestly, we Conservatives do not claim a monopoly of good ideas in this Parliament. In the

spirit of consensus, we share ours with others so that all may be part of the new enlightenment.

11:07

Bob Doris (Glasgow) (SNP): I start by turning my thoughts to another system of taxation that we have already heard a little about this morning. It was brought in by the Conservatives—first in Scotland in 1989, and a year later in the rest of the United Kingdom. It was, of course, the loathed poll tax. I was at secondary school at the time, and my personal protest against the poll tax was the wearing of a T-shirt to school with a large, tabloid-style message on the front. The message would have left any reader in no doubt about how strongly I, as a teenager, felt about the poll tax.

Strong feelings against the poll tax were the order of the day. Direct action, non-payment and even riots signalled people's anger.

Gavin Brown: Will the member give way?

Bob Doris: No, thank you. We have limited time.

I remember the pressure that the poll tax put on the relationship between my father—the head of the household—and me, over whether the poll tax should be paid and over whether we could even afford to pay it. The poll tax led to pressure and conflict in homes, and to anger, direct action and riots in society.

I think that it was Tavish Scott who said earlier that Michael Howard had described the poll tax as the fairest form of taxation. However, in 2003 as Conservative leader, Michael Howard said:

“Obviously the poll tax was a mistake and I have apologised for it.”

The only real surprise was not the apology itself but the fact that it took so long.

Gavin Brown: Will the member give way?

Bob Doris: No, thank you—unless Mr Brown wants to defend the poll tax.

Gavin Brown: Which Prime Minister abolished the poll tax?

Bob Doris: If, after this debate, Mr Brown would like a little synopsis of who was to blame for the poll tax, I will give him such a synopsis in the members' lounge. He really needs his memory jogged.

A clear majority in our nation was against the poll tax. Ultimately, it was abolished. It is gone, but not forgotten—or forgiven. It was replaced by another form of taxation that, on one level, bore an important similarity: when the council tax was introduced, it also took no account of people's ability to pay. That structural flaw in the poll tax

was doppelgangered in the creation of the council tax. The detestation that society felt for the poll tax in the late 1980s and early 1990s still exists for the council tax.

In my maiden speech in the chamber, during the “wealthier and fairer” debate, I said that I believed that there was a clear majority in Scotland in favour of scrapping the council tax. We must strive to find such a majority in this chamber too—a majority that cuts across traditional party lines to serve our people.

Earlier this year in Aviemore, the UK Lib Dem leader, Ming Campbell, said:

“Our principle is simple. People should pay taxes in accordance with their ability to do so. Those who earn less should pay less.”

On the SNP benches and in the Government, we agree with those sentiments. I am sure that others will agree too. There will also be others who believe in taking 500,000 pensioners out of the local taxation system and stopping them living in fear of the annual council tax bills that they cannot pay coming through their doors.

Tackling poverty is high on the political agenda, and rightly so. A number of points have been made recently about how best to define poverty. Definitions have included when a parent cannot afford a bike or a school trip for a child, or when parents cannot take their children on a family holiday. Different people will put the poverty bar at different levels, but no matter where it is placed, a tax on earned income will ensure that people who earn less will pay less—not more as happens at the moment. In a fair and just society, that is surely right. That basic principle, put into the form of a local income tax, will benefit not only our pensioners, but nine out of the 10 income decile groups in society—and the 10th group will pay only moderately more.

Members will remember Michael Howard's belated apology in 2003. I would not like members on the Labour or Conservative benches to have to make a similar apology for the council tax in five or 10 years' time. This Parliament has the power to abolish the council tax. Members who fail to abolish it will not be forgiven by the people of Scotland.

11:12

Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab): In his statement to Parliament on 23 May, the First Minister confirmed that:

“It is still the Government's objective to abolish the hated and oppressive council tax.”—[*Official Report*, 23 May 2007; c 68.]

As we have since heard, it is the intention of the new Executive to replace it with that incredibly

popular tax—income tax. As we know, income tax is so popular that wealthy individuals employ accountants just to ensure that they are not deprived of the pleasure of paying everything that they should be paying. All taxes are disliked. Benjamin Franklin said that the only certainties were death and taxes; very few people welcome either.

We have heard arguments about ability to pay. I would say first that 80 per cent of Government finance comes from general taxation and income tax.

Alasdair Allan (Western Isles) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Elaine Murray: I am sorry; I have only four minutes.

When we consider a policy for local income tax, we have to ask who will be liable to pay it. In working families, couples are already burdened with mortgage repayments, the expenses of bringing up a family, and possibly a student loan. Those families will be expected to stump up, as will young people who are starting their employment and who are living at home with their parents, saving for a place of their own. We must also consider pensioners who pay income tax because they have savings, or because they have invested in contributing to their pensions. After listening to Mr Swinney, I am not quite sure of the SNP's position, but I think that the tax man will be coming for pensioners too.

The arguments against replacing the council tax with a local income tax were well rehearsed during the election campaign. The Executive will find it difficult to get its proposed legislation through this Parliament. A lot will depend on the position of the Greens, who will demonstrate whether or not they have been bought and sold for the price of the convenership of the Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee.

I want to examine the Executive's interim position. As Margo MacDonald said, the Executive has pledged in the short term to freeze council tax. In reply to my written parliamentary question S3W-507—and I apologise if reading that number out makes me sound a bit like Stewart Stevenson in a previous life—Mr Swinney said that the Executive intends to freeze council tax at this year's level. However, in reply to S3W-508, he was unable to say how much additional resource would be made available to Dumfries and Galloway Council to enable it to freeze council tax.

I should perhaps warn Mr Swinney that Dumfries and Galloway Council is already arguing that, to meet financial pressures, it needs an additional £3.8 million next year and a further £3.5 million in the year after that. As did the Conservatives, I ask whether it is better to use resources to freeze

council tax and make everyone a wee bit happier, or whether it would be better to use funds to target council tax relief at those who have the most difficulty in paying the tax.

In 2003, a report from Age Concern estimated that there were 565,000 pensioner households throughout Scotland, of which almost 60 per cent were single-pensioner households. I cannot go through all the arguments in one minute, but I estimate that, if we were to freeze council tax, it would cost something like £45 million in the first year, rising to something like £91 million in 2009-10. However, £91 million would more than cover the cost of halving water rates for pensioner households in that year. So, simply by redirecting the resource that would be used to freeze council tax, we would be able to offer pensioners a reduction by half in their water rates in two years' time.

I have also done the calculation on the Tories' proposals and I came out with £230 million, so I agree with them on that.

It would be cheaper to consider our proposals in the short term and I urge the Executive to do so.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): We now move to the closing speeches. I apologise to those members whom I was not able to call.

11:16

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I am delighted to close on the Green amendment.

I reassure Elaine Murray that I remain entirely my own man. Most members are wrong pretty much all the time, and I will be entirely even handed with my constructive criticism.

It might have been convenient and happy for the Parliament and all political parties if the electorate, in their wisdom, had given us a Parliament that had a clear view on the council tax. However, the arithmetic is on a knife edge: half the Parliament wants a local income tax, but half believes that some form of property tax is an important principle and must remain.

Let us consider the arguments that we have heard on local income tax. First, I will examine its relationship to the ability to pay. The idea of a progressive taxation system in which what one pays relates to what one has is clearly an important principle. However, it is not limited to salaries and can relate to any form of taxation. It is an important principle across the taxation system as a whole, not in relation to one specific tax.

It seemed to me that Tavish Scott's arguments on the ability to pay could almost be used against resource taxes, which the Liberal Democrats

describe as green taxes. Considered individually, resource taxes can appear regressive but, if they are used carefully within an overall progressive system, they can be fair. Similar arguments apply to value added tax.

The other argument for a local income tax is the perception of unfairness that surrounds the council tax—Bob Doris referred to detestation and anger. The sense of unfairness has increased in proportion to the steady increase in council tax levels. We need to take account of that. We need to respond to that sense and recognise that, just as there is no majority in the Parliament for a local income tax, there is no majority for the status quo either.

However, those arguments can be made for other forms of tax, not only council tax or income tax. Let us examine the arguments for some form of property tax. One of the Burt review's conclusions was:

"Property taxes are better suited for use as a local tax than income tax. They are difficult to avoid and suitable for collection locally. They are certain ... they are not susceptible to sudden reductions."

Des McNulty argued that a genuinely fair system takes account of assets and income. People should remember that both are forms of wealth. Reducing the scope of the taxation system as a whole by taking asset wealth out of the equation altogether would only make it easier for people who so desire to avoid paying tax. Even without that deliberate avoidance, under a salary tax—that is what we are talking about with a local income tax—many of the very wealthiest would pay nothing at all.

Robin Harper has talked at length about the benefits of land value tax as not only a fairer but an environmentally and economically better form of local taxation. It would not only help to bring disused land back into economic use and stimulate the economy, but would also help to dampen down some of the problems with the housing market. By contrast, removing any form of property tax would be an inflationary measure.

I recall to members' minds the motion for which the Parliament voted in 2003, agreeing to further investigation into

"the contribution that land value taxation could make to the cultural, economic, environmental and democratic renaissance of Scotland."

The Parliament voted for that. The Scottish National Party voted for it and, if I am to be open to the arguments that it is making today, I need to hear some willingness from the SNP Government to act on that commitment and undertake that investigation.

11:20

Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): This debate on local income tax is the preliminary joust in one of the defining debates of the Parliament. Derek Brownlee was right to say that it is about the direction of travel. It is a decision between the two alternatives: tinkering with the council tax and a fundamental reform that will bring about a local income tax. Whatever the merits of the Greens' proposal, it does not have the broad support of the Parliament and is not the central point of the debate.

Some good speeches have been made. Charlie Gordon made an extremely good point with which I have much sympathy about the constitutional status of local government. Keith Brown made a good, forensic analysis of some of the issues that lie behind the debate. Patrick Harvie also made a number of good points that must be brought on board, answered and dealt with as the argument is developed.

However, at the heart of the debate is a substantial issue about a principle that should prevail in this Parliament: the idea that the citizen in modern Scotland should be taxed for the necessary and beneficial purposes of government, according to his or her ability to pay. It is a simple principle, a moral imperative and a powerful driver of reform, which I urge the Parliament to back. That is not to say that there should be no other forms of tax, but the principle holds true for the principal form of local government taxation.

Any taxation system or reform of it has winners and losers. No one likes paying tax—Elaine Murray almost made an argument for nobody paying any tax at all—and no one likes to pay more tax than they have before but, if the Government gets it right, 60 to 70 per cent of local tax payers in our country will be better off. They are the people who pay the highest proportion of their incomes in tax—people further down the income ladder. Many of them are pensioners or young families that are setting out and many of them are caught by the poverty trap in a country where the gap between rich and poor has widened since Tony Blair and new Labour came to power.

Margo MacDonald: Will Robert Brown give way?

Robert Brown: No. I will make a little progress, if I may.

Local income tax also satisfies another criterion of a good tax: it will be a buoyant source of funding for local government. Keith Brown also made that extremely important point. A local income tax will avoid the horrors of revaluation, which is a necessary aspect of the council tax and has been avoided in Scotland only by the previous Executive's wise decision to postpone it.

Nevertheless, it will have to happen at some point under the current system.

The debate also shows the true nature of the philosophy and political beliefs of Labour and the Conservative party. I challenge the Labour Party to demonstrate whether there is the thickness of a sheet of paper between its position and Tory attitudes to the council tax.

Let us remember where we came from. The council tax is the son of the poll tax, which was brought in with the aim of saving the skins of the then Conservative Government, which had suffered horrendous by-election losses to the Liberal Democrats. It had also just witnessed a tearful Margaret Thatcher's declaration, which was repeated on television recently:

"We are now leaving Downing Street for the last time."

No amount of bluster from the Conservatives and no amount of crocodile tears or cover stories about their concern for pensioners can disguise the fact that the council tax is a fundamentally unfair tax that bears heaviest on the poor. Indeed, John Major had to chuck bucketloads of VAT at it to make it even half tolerable.

The most revealing thing is Labour's backing for the council tax. If ever there was a litmus test of the true nature of new Labour, it must be its backing for the Tory council tax. It is hard to imagine the founding fathers of socialism rejecting a reform that is based on ability to pay and making a nurse, care worker, postman, train conductor or call centre worker pay more, so that Brian Soutar, Bernie Ecclestone, Paul Drayson or the Duke of Buccleuch can pay less.

This is an important debate. It is vital to scrutinise the details, the rates, the accountability to local councils and the economic effects of the proposals. Margo MacDonald made some valid points in that connection. It is also important to build a consensus for major tax reform. The vote today will cross a major rubicon. For the first time, the Parliament will support in principle a proper, appropriate and fair alternative to the council tax with some prospect of relief for many hard-pressed taxpayers on modest incomes.

I urge members to support the Liberal Democrat amendment.

11:25

Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): To a degree, the debate has been predictable, as it deals with a subject that was comprehensively debated in the course of the recent election campaign. There is nothing wrong with that, as the principles that underlie the debate have not changed. What has changed is that we are now debating the subject in the context of a new Parliament and a new

Administration. The stakes are raised and the urgency is heightened. That is why we have lodged an amendment that brings into sharp focus the responsibility of the Executive to be clear about exactly how it will ensure funding for local councils, in good time to allow the Parliament to subject those plans to full and proper scrutiny and to allow councils properly to make their own plans. Mr Swinney has made some kind of commitment in that regard this morning, but the way for members to hold him to that is to support our amendment.

In the absence of any greater clarity, we are entitled to assume that the Executive wishes to pursue the prospectus on which it fought the election—that is, a nationally imposed 3p local income tax rate. Of course, that is inadequate for funding local government services. Furthermore, it is not local. Charlie Gordon, in an excellent speech, made it clear just how fundamental that flaw is.

"For good local democracy it is vital that there is a strong and identifiable relationship between the local electorate, local politicians, and their ability to determine the local rate of taxation."

That was a quote not from Charlie Gordon, but from the SNP's submission to the Burt review. It was true then, and it is true today. It was convenient for the SNP then, but it is inconvenient for the SNP today.

Mr Tavish Scott gave us fair notice that the Liberal Democrats will work with the Executive on this matter. Mr Scott should tell us today if they are prepared to sell the principle of local accountability as part of the negotiations. As well as applied taxation, direct and indirect taxation, taxation on earned and unearned income and taxation on goods and services, a tax based on property should be part of the whole mix. I point out to Robert Brown that it was one of the principles of the founders of socialism that wealth and property, and indeed unearned income, should be subject to taxation.

A property tax is easy to collect and hard to avoid. It provides a stable source of revenue for local government.

Keith Brown: Does that principle extend to the super-rich venture capitalists who were featured on "Newsnight" last night, who pay an absolute minimum of tax under a Labour regime in London?

Iain Gray: Those are the very people who would pay nothing under the proposals on which Keith Brown's party fought the election.

A property tax is fair if it is properly mitigated through a system of discounts and benefits. Many members have repeated the mantra that a local income tax is based on the ability to pay. It is not as simple as that. It is based on the ability to earn.

It takes no account of age, as council tax does. It takes no account of caring responsibilities, as council tax does. It takes no account of disability, as council tax does. It takes no account of responsibilities for children, as council tax does.

What about student nurses? The Executive trumpeted a 2.5 per cent increase in their pay packets, but it wants to take 3 per cent out. Student nurses currently pay no council tax; under the Executive's proposals, they would pay local income tax. About 450,000 Scottish pensioners pay income tax. Under a local income tax, they will be paying more, and it is dishonest to pretend otherwise.

We can make council tax fairer, and we should. If we really want to help pensioners, Derek Brownlee, Elaine Murray and even Alex Neil have each suggested a way. We can improve local tax. We can do so without crippling local government, without stripping accountability from councillors and without making Scotland the highest-taxed part of the United Kingdom.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call John Swinney. You have six minutes.

11:29

John Swinney: Presiding Officer—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Five minutes.

Members: Four!

John Swinney: I agree with Iain Gray that Charlie Gordon made an excellent speech. This Administration believes much more than the previous Administration did in the significance of the role of local government in our country.

Members: Oh!

John Swinney: Labour members can jeer as usual, but they should talk to local authority leaders, who feel that the previous Administration ring fenced money and tied the hands of local government, using it not as part of the democratic fabric of our society but as a delivery agent that was dictated to by ministers. This Government will not follow the same route. Mr Gordon should be assured that the minister takes a supportive approach to local government. We intend to build on the powers and responsibilities of local authorities.

Iain Gray: I accept Mr Swinney's point. I believe that he thinks that the accountability of local government is important. Will he therefore admit that the reason for suggesting a nationally imposed 3p rate is the realisation, part way through an election campaign, that the rate would in fact have to be levied at a level somewhere between 6.5p and 7p, and that the Executive's

proposals are simply a matter of expediency, not principle?

John Swinney: It is a matter of administrative efficiency to ensure that a system can be up and running to tackle some of the legitimate issues that Margo MacDonald raised in her speech. The policy was not announced during the election; it was announced well before the election campaign that that was exactly what we were going to do.

Robert Brown made an excellent speech. He rightly characterised the debate as the "preliminary joust" on a big issue for the Parliament. It is important that we do not close the door on the idea of reform. That is the choice that we all have today. It is a question of whether we leave the door open to the reform of local authority taxation or accept the position of the Conservatives and the Labour Party that we should slam that door shut. I appeal to Parliament to keep that door open, so that we can consider the issues in greater detail.

That brings me to the points that—

Margo MacDonald rose—

John Swinney: I am just about to address the points that Margo MacDonald made. I am terribly sorry that she did not receive a reply from Alex Salmond to her letter, but so many of the points that she raised are matters on which we published information and commentary before the election campaign. They are, however, material to the consideration of this issue, and they will be the subject of the Government's consultation later in the year, when we set out our opinions on those points.

Margo MacDonald: I have another question. Keith Brown said that 60 to 70 per cent of people would benefit from the Executive's proposals. First, what if ministers are wrong? Secondly, what happens to the 30 per cent? By how much would they lose?

John Swinney: The Liberal Democrats' estimates were that, under their proposals, 70 per cent would benefit and 30 per cent would be worse off. As was validated by the Institute of Fiscal Studies, 90 per cent of Scots would benefit from our proposals. That clearly must be examined in further detail.

Patrick Harvie raised a point about land value taxation. I return to my original point in relation to Mr Brownlee's comments. The opportunity for us to give any consideration to land value taxation depends on our ability to keep open the door of the debate on local taxation reform. The Conservatives and the Labour Party want to close the door on the debate on reform. We want to continue consideration of the issues. We will advance our arguments for local income tax. I very

much welcome the fact that the Liberal Democrats intend to do so, too. I welcome the fact that the Green party has proposals on land value tax.

I am happy for further consideration to be given to the motion that the Parliament agreed to in January 2003. The Government will consider all the suggestions that have been made, including what Elaine Murray said about water charges. Her proposal is not the position of the Government just now, but we will consider it in the spirit of consensus and open discussion.

The points that David McLetchie raised about the Burt review were fascinating. He has reverted to his old days as a lawyer. He now believes that a higher standard of proof should be required for a new proposal, unlike for the atrocious and unfair system that is in place now. Let us have a bit of consistency. The Burt review trashed the council tax, and it should not be used as a fig leaf to defend an indefensible position.

11:34

Gavin Brown (Lothians) (Con): The bottom line is that the local income tax sums do not add up. Several months ago, on the campaign trail, I heard Liberal Democrat and SNP candidates saying that 90 per cent of people would be better off under this system.

Mike Rumbles: Seventy per cent.

Gavin Brown: A week later, in a different hustings, it was 80 per cent. Then it became 70 per cent, as Mr Rumbles is now saying. Today, we heard from Keith Brown that 60 per cent of people would probably be better off. I wonder where we will end up in a few months' time—probably much closer to the real figure.

The problem that the SNP and the Liberal Democrats have had today—as they have had in every hustings that I have ever been to—is that although they do not like the council tax, which they want to scrap, they have no clear idea of what to replace it with.

Tavish Scott: That is ridiculous.

Gavin Brown: All the speakers from those parties have been extremely light on detail. Mr Scott may say, from a sedentary position, that my suggestion is ridiculous, but, in his speech, he spent more time talking about the poll tax than he did about the local income tax.

As Derek Brownlee said, we do not think that the council tax is perfect, but we think that it is a lot better—

Bob Doris: What about the poll tax?

Gavin Brown: The member did not answer my question about which Prime Minister abolished the poll tax, so he should not interject now.

Mr Brownlee also pointed out that we have a clear and costed policy to help our pensioners, who suffer most under the current council tax. We are calling for a 50 per cent discount for them, which could easily be incorporated by this Government now and would meet with broad support from members across the chamber, including Alex Neil, as we heard earlier.

Mr Swinney's arguments against our proposal do not add up. He does not like the proposal because some rich pensioners would benefit. However, in almost the same breath, he says that we are going to have a two-year council tax freeze across the board. Presumably, that will not discriminate between rich, poor and anyone else.

A local income tax would be a step backwards for this country. It is a tax on hard-working families. Most families in this country would be worse off under the new system, as would just about every household in which two or more people work. A nurse and a police officer living together would be around £500 or £600 worse off a year. That is not fair.

Margo MacDonald: Do those figures refer to Mr Swinney's proposals or to a general example of a local income tax?

Gavin Brown: Those figures are based on the Burt review, which talks about a rate of 6.5p in the pound. We are being sold a pup. It is convenient for the SNP to say that the rate will be 3 per cent but, in fact, it has the ability to vary the tartan tax by 3 per cent quite easily. We do not believe the SNP's figures. If the rate is 3 per cent, there will be a shortfall of at least £1 billion a year. Where will the money come from to make up that shortfall? Does the SNP have a plan B?

It was interesting to hear Robert Brown say, "We are not saying that local income tax is the only tax that we should have for local government." Is that a tacit admission that Robert Brown knows that the sums do not stack up and that that means that something else must be done?

Robert Brown: That is not what I said. I said that there is a basket of other taxes and that we did not rule out other forms of taxation. VAT and so on obviously exist.

Gavin Brown: But what the member specifically said was that he did not rule out other taxes at a local level.

The biggest weakness in the position of the Liberal Democrats and the SNP is that they completely ignore the larger picture of local government finance. They ignore what councillors are saying, which is—as Charlie Gordon pointed

out in an excellent speech—that the tax system that is proposed is simply not local. If it were introduced, our local councils would lose some of their autonomy and local accountability would be eroded. If there is not enough money to enable parties to do what they said they were going to do in the manifestos on which they were elected in May, what are they going to do?

The position of the Liberal Democrats and the SNP also ignores the wishes of business. The proposal would put an additional burden of around £30 million on business every year. On the one hand, we have Jim Mather—who presumably was not allowed to speak in this debate because of his position on income tax—cutting red tape for businesses and, on the other hand, we have John Swinney tying up those businesses with yellow tape. We do not need that extra burden on business when we are trying to grow our economy.

The local income tax would also hit the self-employed, students, student nurses, pensioners who have saved hard for their retirement, hard-working families and any number of other people.

People who rob Peter to pay Paul can always count on the support of Paul. However, under the proposal, it would be not only Peter who would lose out, but students, business and hard-working families. That is why the Conservatives are saying no to the local income tax. Not here, not now, not at all.

Question Time

SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

General Questions

11:40

Scottish Servicemen Killed Abroad (Investigations)

1. Keith Brown (Ochil) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what discussions it is having with the United Kingdom Government on proposals to permit investigations into the deaths of Scottish servicemen killed abroad to take place in Scotland. (S3O-349)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): We are acutely aware of the sensitivity of this issue and share the desire to find a system that will reduce the stress, anguish and delay for bereaved families.

The Scottish Government, continuing work done by ministers in the previous Administration, has been in contact with the United Kingdom Government with a view to finding the best resolution of this issue, having regard to the legal context. That contact is on-going.

We welcome the UK Government's desire to work with us to find the best way to investigate deaths of Scotland-based service personnel who are killed abroad.

Keith Brown: I thank the cabinet secretary for his response and for the co-operative action he is taking with the Westminster Government on this matter. Does he agree that it is possible and necessary for the Scottish Government to take that co-operative work further in the interests of service personnel who are from or based in Scotland, and their families, including those who served in the Falklands war, many of whom are still suffering and are able to access ever fewer and less appropriate facilities for their welfare?

Kenny MacAskill: Absolutely. I am aware of the member's service in the Falklands conflict and agree that it is the duty of this Government to co-operate with everyone who can help us to ensure that we can look after the interests of those who have served in conflicts, those who have suffered and those who have lost loved ones. We will continue to do so. The legal field is complicated, but I assure the member that we are keen to resolve the issue.

Firth of Forth (Road Crossing)

2. Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what progress is

being made in planning for a replacement road crossing for the Forth. (S3O-305)

The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): The Forth replacement crossing study has now concluded and Transport Scotland is considering the study findings. A paper is being prepared for the Cabinet to consider options and the associated costs, to allow an early decision on this important project.

Claire Baker: I am pleased that the minister recognises that it is vital for the economic and social future of Fife and the east of Scotland that planning for a replacement road crossing begins now, and that a situation in which travel to and from Fife is unreasonably restricted is not allowed to develop.

I would like to impress on the minister the importance of consultation with the current bridge workforce on changes and new proposals. Can the minister give me a guarantee that there will be full consultation of the people of Fife on the options for a replacement road crossing?

Stewart Stevenson: In relation to the changes that have been announced to the tolling regime on the existing bridge, the workforce is at the front of our minds and the Forth Estuary Transport Authority has taken appropriate steps with regard to consultation.

On the new crossing, whatever its nature might be, we have to take the people of Fife and the people on this side of the estuary along with us. The project is a strategic one that we have to get right and for which we have a tightly constrained timetable. Consultation will be an important part of taking the project forward.

Tricia Marwick (Central Fife) (SNP): I congratulate the cabinet minister for moving this issue forward quickly. I look forward to an announcement about the conclusions of the study being made in the near future.

Does the minister agree that we are so late coming to conclusions because, in November 2005, the former First Minister said that it was a particularly stupid idea to start making plans? If that had not been his position, we could have been a lot further forward than we are at the moment.

Stewart Stevenson: I thank the member for her promotion of me to the Cabinet. One never knows—some day.

At this stage, it is important to examine some of the timetable constraints that we are faced with. It is possible—although this is the earliest date—that the bridge will have to close to heavy goods vehicles in 2013. Work continues, and we hope that that will not be the case. If we can proceed at

the pace that we seek, it may be possible to start construction in 2016. I am determined that we will have no further delays in addressing an issue that is important for Fife and the Lothians.

Sarah Boyack (Edinburgh Central) (Lab): Will the minister give a commitment to ensure that the proposals for the new Forth crossing include options for public transport? Does he accept that the new crossing gives us the chance not just to maintain vital road access across the Forth but to increase capacity for public transport, particularly given the pressure on the Forth rail bridge and the need to reduce congestion and carbon emissions?

Stewart Stevenson: The importance of public transport is very much part of our consideration of the replacement crossing. The member is likely to know that there are issues with signalling on the existing railway bridge; we are addressing them, following up on the work of the previous Administration. She may be assured that, as well as provide a new road crossing, we want public transport to be improved between Fife and the Lothians.

Transport (Ayrshire)

3. Cathy Jamieson (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what its transport priorities are for Ayrshire. (S3O-322)

The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): Transport priorities for Ayrshire are the responsibility of the Strathclyde Partnership for Transport and the relevant local authorities. The Scottish Executive will continue to work closely with those bodies, in line with the national transport strategy, to meet the transport needs of Ayrshire.

Cathy Jamieson: The Scottish Executive has responsibility for trunk roads. Does the minister agree that road safety for vehicle passengers and pedestrians is a key element of any transport strategy? Does he consider further improvements to the A77 in my constituency, including a bypass for Maybole, to be a priority? Will he examine the accident statistics for the A70 and consider making it a trunk road in light of its strategic importance in connecting south and east Ayrshire with the M74? Finally, will he consider what improvements can be made to the A76, including bypassing the villages that suffer from heavy traffic, such as Mauchline and New Cumnock, and take early action to ensure that the footpath that runs part of the way between Cumnock and New Cumnock is completed so that those who walk the route regularly can do so in safety?

Stewart Stevenson: It may interest the member to know that I will shortly consider the regional transport strategies. I expect to see reflected in

those that affect Ayrshire the matters that she raised. On a date yet to be agreed, I will visit Ayrshire to see some of the roads in question. I will do so at the invitation of John Scott, the Conservative MSP, but I will be happy to meet other people during that visit if it assists in ensuring that I understand the issues in sufficient detail to respond appropriately.

Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP): I draw the minister's attention to the fact that the lack of sufficient public transport connections between different points is a barrier to economic expansion in Ayrshire. Will he consider the possibility of setting up, on a pilot basis, a bus route development fund similar to the successful air route development fund, to try to remove those barriers to economic development in Ayrshire?

Stewart Stevenson: A bus route development grant is already in existence: it provides £22.5 million over three years to support 50 new and enhanced bus services across Scotland. I note what the member says about public transport in Ayr. When I read the regional transport strategy later this month, I will certainly respond to the issue he has raised.

Homelessness

4. Charlie Gordon (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it will investigate and report to the Parliament on evidence submitted to it suggesting that certain councils may be in breach of the Homeless Persons (Unsuitable Accommodation) (Scotland) Order 2004 and its associated code of guidance by routinely housing homeless persons in bed and breakfast accommodation outside their local authority areas. (S3O-318)

The Minister for Communities and Sport (Stewart Maxwell): I am aware of the member's comments on the subject in yesterday's *Herald*. Officials of the local authorities named have denied breaching the order by placing homeless households in the accommodation in Glasgow that was referred to. Glasgow City Council, along with other authorities, has agreed protocols to manage out-of-area placements for homeless people and the number of placements has decreased significantly.

Charlie Gordon: I have sent the minister a letter and appended the evidence that I gathered, under the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002, from the councils to which he referred. I look forward to his having an opportunity to study the information. Is he aware that several premises in my constituency are constantly used by homeless persons from outside Glasgow, who are sent by councils without professional support, which results in personal crises and has an impact on

local residents? Will he personally scrutinise the legitimacy of those councils' actions?

Stewart Maxwell: I have not received the member's letter yet. When it arrives, I will read carefully his comments and any evidence he has attached. The member makes an important point: if there is evidence of a breach of the code, that is unacceptable, but until we can consider the evidence, I am unable to go much further. I will be happy, if the evidence holds up, to write to the local authorities concerned, bring them in for a meeting to discuss the problems, and ensure that we overcome the problems so that there are no breaches of the code in the member's area or in others.

Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): As the homelessness figures have increased, and following concerns that the legislation is not fit for purpose, will the minister consider an urgent review of the homelessness problems that now face us and how best to deal with them?

Stewart Maxwell: The member may be interested in this afternoon's debate on housing, and I am sure he is aware that the Government has committed to the 2012 target on homelessness. There is no doubt that it is a tough target and that it will be difficult to meet. This afternoon, I will lay out some of the possible ways in which we can get much closer to achieving it by 2012. I hope that the member will take part in that discussion and in the discussions in the near future.

Moray (Flood Alleviation)

5. Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive whether the Moray flood alleviation schemes will be implemented in full. (S3O-275)

The Minister for Environment (Michael Russell): It is for Moray Council to determine whether it will implement its own proposed schemes in full. Once the council decides its plans and submits them to the Government, we can consider them for the purpose of confirmation by the Scottish ministers and, in turn, I hope, grant support.

Mary Scanlon: I thank the minister for that and a previous written reply on the subject.

Given the increasing costs of and delays to the flood alleviation schemes in Moray, and bearing in mind the Government's proposed freeze on council tax, will the minister advise members how councils such as Moray will be able to find the additional funds to pay their 20 per cent share of the increased costs of the schemes?

Michael Russell: I thank Mary Scanlon for that pertinent question. I know that she, the local member for Moray, Richard Lochhead, and the previous member for Moray have been active in ensuring that the council can find those moneys.

As Mary Scanlon knows, the two schemes that are presently under consideration—the Burn of Mosset and the Rothes flood alleviation schemes—are nearly there. In terms of objections, we are almost at the stage at which we can move forward, and grant will be available. The larger schemes to which the member referred are still under discussion, and finding the balance in funding will be an issue as the question of flood prevention continues. My friend sitting in front of me, the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth, will say more about flood prevention this afternoon.

Sentencing

6. Margaret Curran (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive when it will bring forward proposals on sentencing. (S3O-311)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): There are a number of factors to be considered. I announced to Parliament on 6 June 2007 that we are embarking on an extensive review of community sentences. At the same time, we are looking at how to manage custodial sentences to reduce the risk posed by the more serious offenders when they are released and to help them address their offending behaviour. Our plans must also take account of judicial discretion in sentencing in individual cases. That is important work, and we want to consider options carefully and seek Parliament's views before finally deciding on the way ahead.

Margaret Curran: The Scottish National Party manifesto promised to introduce a presumption against sending to prison those who are sentenced to less than six months. Does the minister appreciate that that would mean that a significant number of men who are convicted of domestic violence offences could avoid prison because of SNP policy, thereby possibly threatening the safety of many women? Will the SNP abandon that simplistic approach and ensure that those who perpetrate acts of domestic violence face the full force of the law, or does the minister regard those men as “the flotsam and jetsam” of society?

Kenny MacAskill: Those who perpetrate domestic violence deserve the punishment that the courts correctly mete out. This country of ours requires a coherent prison policy. We need to move away from serious and dangerous offenders not being incarcerated when they should be while those who have been described as “the flotsam and jetsam” are incarcerated at huge cost to the

community, only to be released to reoffend. That does not resolve the problem. The Government's emphasis is on addressing the requirement for a coherent penal policy that will protect our communities by locking up serious and dangerous violent offenders, but which will ensure that the many people who require treatment because of mental health problems or drug addiction are dealt with sympathetically to ensure that we get the community and society that Scotland needs.

Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con): Does the cabinet secretary agree that any plans to reduce short-term prison sentences should be predicated not on the need to empty prisons and institutions, but on the recognition that public safety is a priority? Does he agree that the fact that so many short-term prison sentences are being imposed is clear and tangible evidence that the existing alternatives are simply not working?

Kenny MacAskill: I have a great deal of sympathy with that view: it is clear that far too many sheriffs impose short sentences that they know will be of little benefit to the individual. They do so out of frustration, not out of desire, and because they believe that there is no realistic alternative. That is why it is the Government's priority to ensure that sheriffs have options and alternatives. Indeed, options should be available not only to sheriffs; the Crown Office's view is that as well as being able to impose a fiscal fine, it should be able to use a method of ensuring that those who transgress and who should pay back our communities have the opportunity to do so by visible work and by returning to the communities and removing the harm they created.

I sympathise fully with the member's point that we must ensure that we provide appropriate alternatives. That is why, on sentencing, as well as putting measures on the statute book, we desire to ensure that measures that are already on the statute book operate in practice, which in many instances is not the case. We must ensure that the array of community sentences is expanded to provide assistance to sheriffs and the Crown Office.

General Practitioners

7. Mary Mulligan (Linlithgow) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive how it plans to increase the number of people becoming GPs. (S3O-336)

The Minister for Public Health (Shona Robison): NHS Scotland announced in its “National Workforce Plan 2006” that the number of GP training posts would increase by 50 from August 2007, which means that 890 training places will be available from that date. The number of training places that NHS Scotland requires is determined by local and national workforce planning.

Mary Mulligan: We see a changing picture of those who are becoming GPs. For example, more women are becoming GPs and male and female GPs are sharing caring responsibilities. Will the Scottish Government encourage more GPs to become salaried rather than small businesspeople? What resources are available to support that?

Shona Robison: We encourage GPs into the salaried service and will continue to do so. We acknowledge the changing face of GPs and that many now come from different backgrounds, which is to be welcomed. We must ensure that the system supports that flexibility and we intend to make progress on that.

Alasdair Allan (Western Isles) (SNP): On the other side of the equation, what support will the Government give to encourage people to become partners in practices, with all the responsibility that that entails? What support can the Government supply to practices that get into financial difficulties? It will be aware of examples of that.

Shona Robison: We are aware of such examples. Substantial assistance is available to GPs, particularly those who are located in more rural and remote areas, of which the member will be aware. The golden hello scheme pays out to GPs who establish new practices; additional payments are also available to those in rural and remote areas. Other assistance can be given to GPs who find themselves in difficulties. If the member wants to write to me specifically about his concerns, I am more than prepared to give him more details.

First Minister's Question Time

12:00

Engagements

1. Jack McConnell (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab): To ask the First Minister what engagements he has planned for the rest of the day. (S3F-74)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): I have a number of engagements, including a visit to the Royal Highland show at Ingliston, that great showcase for the Scottish food and farming industry.

Jack McConnell: Earlier this month, at the first First Minister's question time in the new session, the First Minister rather shamefully misquoted Donald Dewar and threatened to ignore the Parliament when it expressed its will. I remind the First Minister that never once in five and a half years as First Minister did I ignore the will of the Parliament. Has he reflected on his statement earlier this month? Will he guarantee that when the Parliament votes for legislation or budgets for a proposal, he will not to delay it or defy the will of Parliament?

The First Minister: I quoted exactly Donald Dewar from 4 October 1999. I remind Jack McConnell that Donald Dewar said:

"As part of"

the

"perfectly normal constitutional arrangements, except in certain circumstances, the Scottish Executive is not necessarily bound by resolutions or motions passed by the Scottish Parliament."

Does the former First Minister now agree with Donald Dewar, or has he changed his mind?

Jack McConnell: Mr Salmond is going to have to learn that it is First Minister's questions, not leader of the Opposition's questions. That was yet another answer from the First Minister that does not really address the question, in a week when we have seen more and more broken promises from the Scottish National Party. A promise to Northern Ireland about tuition fees was broken within 24 hours; a promise on class sizes was torn apart by Fiona Hyslop; and a promise on school discipline was completely ignored. The First Minister even confirmed this morning what we have all suspected: that he is indeed the emperor without any clothes.

The First Minister said that he would listen to the Auditor General for Scotland about the Edinburgh trams. The Auditor General has said that the cost and time targets for the Edinburgh trams project have been developed using robust systems and that the highest cost risk is the general delay in the

programme. Will the First Minister stop delaying and announce today that he will go ahead?

The First Minister: I answered Mr McConnell's point specifically. It is not my fault if he cannot think of the right questions. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): Order.

The First Minister: In terms of the achievements of this Administration in implementing our manifesto, I see Labour members progressively taken aback by the speed at which we have implemented our manifesto over the past five weeks.

I give Jack McConnell this assurance: I will always appear before the Parliament properly dressed. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Settle down.

The First Minister: I will never wear a pin-striped kilt.

Jack McConnell: We have no guarantee from the First Minister that he will respect the will of Parliament, even on legislation or budgets, and no answer on, or even a vague reference to, the Edinburgh trams.

I will ask the First Minister a question that he might find a little easier. What do Belgium, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Greece, Austria and Switzerland all have in common?

The First Minister: They are all independent countries and they all come above Scotland in the index of success that was compiled by the Labour Party's former economist, or, as Jack McConnell is calling it, the index of deferred success.

I remind Jack McConnell of the importance of parliamentary votes. Members asked us to bring to the chamber information about infrastructure projects. I direct him to the substance of the Auditor General's report. On the Edinburgh airport rail link, the report states:

"The EARL project is unlikely to be delivered by the target date of the end of 2011 ... There is no clear governance framework ... There is no procurement strategy in place"

and there is a high degree of uncertainty. It states that the

"project board did not meet between April 2006 and February 2007"

and that it has yet to secure any contribution from BAA or indeed ownership from Network Rail. Under those circumstances, even Jack McConnell could not possibly vote for the EARL project.

Jack McConnell: Each of the small countries that I mentioned has a rail link from the airport to its capital city, and there should be such a link in

Scotland. Indeed, Alex Salmond called for such a link in the House of Commons in 2002 and Miss Sturgeon called for it in the Scottish Parliament in 2004. Mr MacAskill said that the project

"is expensive, but what you get in return is more than just a rail link."

The Parliament resolved that the rail link would be more than just a rail link for Edinburgh—it would be a rail link to the rest of Scotland. Does the First Minister have ambition for Scotland? Will he take personal responsibility for ensuring that the rail link from Edinburgh airport to the rest of Scotland is delivered on time and within budget, in the same way that he claimed over and over that Donald Dewar should take responsibility for the Parliament building?

The First Minister: The Holyrood project is not a particularly auspicious example from the former Minister for Finance. However, he has given me an opportunity to reflect on what the Auditor General said in his report about the trams project. He stated:

"The highest cost risks are currently utilities diversion work".

Utilities will be diverted if the tram project goes ahead and we start to dig up Edinburgh. The Auditor General said that there is

"sufficient funding in place to proceed with Phase 1a",

but there is

"a current shortfall of £48.8 million"

for the completion of phase 1. In other words, the sub-phase can be completed, but not the whole of phase 1. I remind Jack McConnell that if we start to dig up Edinburgh's roads for the project—which I will vote against—it will be a bit like "Mastermind": if we start, we have to finish.

Cabinet (Meetings)

2. Annabel Goldie (West of Scotland) (Con): To ask the First Minister what issues will be discussed at the next meeting of the Cabinet. (S3F-75)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): The Cabinet will, in the interests of the Scottish people, discuss a range of vital matters.

Annabel Goldie: I have been considering the First Minister's honeymoon period and will give praise where praise is due. Mr Salmond is mastering the arts of his office—oratory, eloquence, intellectual stimulus—but there is one first ministerial trait at which he excels: the U-turn. Student grants and loans were going, but now they will not go. School assault statistics were going to be released, but now they will not be. Class sizes were going to be cut immediately, but now they will not be. Tuition fees for Northern Irish

students in Scotland were going to be scrapped, but now they will not be. There have been other U-turns. Will the First Minister clarify whether another U-turn is looming? Is he now abandoning a local income tax? Does he support a land value tax?

The First Minister: We support a local income tax; we will therefore introduce legislation to repeal the unfair and oppressive council tax. I am not confident of Annabel Goldie's support in these matters, but I am ever hopeful of it. We have an absolute commitment to a local income tax. To paraphrase somebody from a few years ago: you turn if you want to; this Administration is not for turning.

Annabel Goldie: In this Parliament, what the First Minister wants and what he gets might be two very different matters. All the indications are that he will find it extremely difficult to win support in the Parliament for a local income tax. I ask him again whether, given that the council tax—whatever he thinks of it—is currently the burden that bears most oppressively on our older citizens, he will support some kind of council tax discount system for our pensioners.

The First Minister: As Annabel Goldie knows, we are working to freeze the council tax. I am sure that it will be greeted with great joy throughout Scotland that at last, someone is acting to try to limit that oppressive burden on the Scottish people. Annabel Goldie rightly declares the council tax, which was introduced by the Conservative Party and increased vastly by the Labour Party, to be oppressive. What I cannot understand about her question is why on earth, if she believes as I do that the tax is oppressive, she does not vote with us to abolish it.

Chancellor of the Exchequer (Meetings)

3. Nicol Stephen (Aberdeen South) (LD): To ask the First Minister when he will next meet the Chancellor of the Exchequer and what issues they will discuss. (S3F-76)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): I hope to meet the Chancellor of the Exchequer at the British-Irish Council in Belfast next month.

Nicol Stephen: On Edinburgh trams, on 30 May, Stewart Stevenson said that costs were "out of control". Yesterday, the Auditor General for Scotland said that the

"Financial management and reporting of the project appears sound".

Who is right?

The First Minister: I read out earlier some of the key points from the Auditor General's report on these infrastructure projects.

George Foulkes (Lothians) (Lab): Answer the question.

The First Minister: The information that has come back to the Parliament vindicates entirely the five votes in the Parliament that said that we must have that financial information. [*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Excuse me, First Minister. Such sedentary exclamations may be suitable for another place, but they are not suitable in this chamber. [*Applause.*]

The First Minister: When we look in detail at the Auditor General's report, which I am sure Nicol Stephen has read, one thing stands out with extraordinary clarity: according to the Auditor General, there were no meetings of the project board between April 2006 and February 2007. Where was the former Minister for Transport when that project was running into the sands? Was he absent without leave?

Nicol Stephen: The First Minister's response suggests that he has not yet properly read the Auditor General's positive report. I am asking about the Edinburgh trams project today. Why is it that the First Minister's spin doctor was quoted this morning as saying that the SNP motion next week will call for both projects to be cancelled and his ministers say that costs are "out of control", but the Auditor General says that the projects are "sound" and "robust"? Ministers have said that they need a week to work out what to do next, but the First Minister's spin doctor says that they decided last night. Scottish business is waiting, the projects are waiting and the Parliament is waiting. Can we have an honest statement about this important project from someone in the Government?

The First Minister: I also read out the quotes from the Auditor General about the trams project. I am particularly interested in the shortfall of £48.8 million that he identified in phase 1. Perhaps in next week's debate, Nicol Stephen will tell us where that £48.8 million will come from. Will it come from the council tax payers of Edinburgh or does he expect the Executive just to extend the budget?

On the BBC website today, Paddy Ashdown is quoted as saying:

"You do not build partnership government by seeking to add the Liberal Democrats as a bungalow annexe to a Labour government."

Nice words. I suspect that that construction project was over budget as well.

Joint Ministerial Committees

4. Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP): To ask the First Minister what progress is being made in re-establishing joint ministerial committees with the United Kingdom Government. (S3F-83)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): I intend to call for a meeting of the joint ministerial committee when Gordon Brown becomes Prime Minister.

Alex Neil: Does the First Minister agree that it is an indictment of the previous Administration that the joint ministerial committees, which the late Donald Dewar carefully established, were allowed to fall into disrepair? After the joint ministerial committees are re-established, will the First Minister take an early opportunity to raise the need to transfer powers under schedule 5 to the Scotland Act 1998 from Westminster to Holyrood, starting with the repatriation of Scotland's oil and gas revenues to this Parliament?

The First Minister: Alex Neil and I are at one—as we always are—on wishing to extend the Parliament's powers. As for establishing the procedures, I hope that the argument for having a proper, organised and formal structure of decision making throughout the United Kingdom—between the Assemblies and the Parliaments—is supported not just in this chamber but in Belfast and Cardiff. Enthusiasm is great for putting decision making in a proper structure and for not tolerating the position that the last plenary meeting of the joint ministerial committee was in October 2002—perhaps that explains some of the misunderstandings and difficulties that have arisen in the intervening five years.

Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind): How does the First Minister plan to approach the Prime Minister to discover what was decided in Europe without a by-your-leave or information being sought from this Parliament or the Northern Ireland Assembly? From reading the Scotland Act 1998, I think that we should have been consulted.

The First Minister: The one joint ministerial sub-committee that is working is on Europe. Linda Fabiani represented Scotland at that sub-committee's meeting last week before the European Council meeting. She expressed concerns and identified issues on which Scotland has much at stake.

Before the Liaison Committee on Monday, the Prime Minister described a number of what he called red-line issues, with some of which we agree, such as the need to protect the independence of the judiciary in Scotland and the integrity of the Scottish legal system. Whitehall seems to be well aware that that issue is important.

We will certainly know more in the next few days about the full extent of what will come out of the European Council meeting. That will be followed by an intergovernmental conference. I hope and believe that the incoming Prime Minister will be very sensitive to the views of this Parliament, this Government and the people of Scotland in

identifying issues that may give us substantial concern.

Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): I will ask about procedure. Does the First Minister agree that personal and political relationships with the UK Government are vital to the success of government in Scotland? He gave a commitment to Dr Paisley and Martin McGuinness to review the application of tuition fees to non-Scotland-domiciled students. Did he inform the UK Government of that, in line with the concordat between the Scottish ministers and the Secretary of State for Education and Skills? If so, when did he do that?

The First Minister: As I have been given the opportunity, I will say a word about what I found in Northern Ireland. [*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Order.

The First Minister: It is inspiring to see two parties—indeed, many parties—working so closely together in a way that people would have thought unimaginable only a few weeks ago. That is the big picture that we should look at when we consider Northern Ireland, and we should do everything that we can to help.

As Robert Brown must know, we cannot remove fees for Northern Irish students under the terms of the order that the Parliament has passed. However, if the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland tell us that there are ways—not by abolishing fees—in which the flow of students between Northern Ireland and Scotland can be maintained and secured, given the situation, the Parliament and the Government should respond constructively and imaginatively.

Members: Answer the question.

The First Minister: The answer to the member's question is, "Obviously not," as the premise of the question did not arise.

Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): Further to that point, will the First Minister report to the Parliament on the joint ministerial committees that he intends to set up? Specifically, I ask him to report on his plans to use English taxes to spend on Northern Irish students who attend Scottish universities.

The First Minister: That is an extraordinarily convoluted question. It would have been better if, instead of pursuing that line, the member had changed his question after he heard the previous answer. I will be delighted to report to the Parliament on the progress that I hope will be made in establishing the JMCs. We all have a great deal to gain from having organised and respectful decision making across these islands.

Asylum Seeker Families

5. Bill Butler (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab): To ask the First Minister, during refugee week Scotland 2007, what stage has been reached in implementing the March 2006 agreement between the Executive and the Home Office on the treatment of asylum seeker families. (S3F-88)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): I salute Bill Butler for the consistent work that he has done on the issue over many months since he came to the Parliament. We are working towards full implementation of the March 2006 agreement. We will hold the Home Office and the Border and Immigration Agency to account for every element of that agreement, and we will press for further progress where that is required in the interests of children, families and communities in Scotland that are affected by these issues.

Bill Butler: The First Minister will know that, when I raised the matter with his predecessor on 29 March, Mr McConnell was able to report significant progress in respect of enhanced background checks on immigration staff and that agreement had been reached on

"lead professional arrangements, which should ensure that the particular needs of children are taken into account."—*[Official Report, 29 March 2007; c 33757.]*

Mr McConnell also evinced a hope—indeed, an expectation—that the 1,000 so-called legacy cases would be treated in a proper and sensitive manner, resulting in many such individuals being allowed to stay.

Given the overlapping nature of devolved and reserved responsibilities in this area, will the First Minister, when he meets the new Prime Minister, pledge to continue the approach of Jack McConnell in working co-operatively with Westminster, so that the agreement is put fully in place and legacy cases are dealt with humanely? Will the First Minister report back to the chamber on the outcome of his discussions with Gordon Brown on this very serious matter?

The First Minister: The answer to the last part of Bill Butler's question is yes. I saluted him for his work on the issue and I do so again. However, I do not share his interpretation that substantial progress has been made on the issue since 2006. The former Minister for Education and Young People provided a detailed written update on the non-implementation of the agreement to the Communities Committee and the Education Committee on 20 March. We should all realise that there has been considerable dragging of feet by the BIA in respect of lead professional arrangements. Adam Ingram is meeting Glasgow City Council today to ensure that there can be no suggestion that there will be any delays in Scotland to excuse in any way either the BIA or

the Home Office from implementing an agreement that, after all, was reached in March 2006. I think that all members would have wanted much greater progress to have been made by June 2007.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I am sure that the First Minister is aware that one of the reasons why children of asylum seekers have been treated so badly, especially in Glasgow in incidents known as dawn raids, is that the United Kingdom Government has made a decision to exclude those children from the terms of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Does he agree that it is shameful that some of the most vulnerable children in our country do not have access to the same basic protection on which children in civilised countries around the world can rely? Will he commit the Government to ensuring that its devolved functions are exercised as though the UNCRC applies to those children?

The First Minister: I agree with what Patrick Harvie says and I make the commitment that he requests.

Hugh O'Donnell (Central Scotland) (LD): I am sure that the First Minister agrees that Dungavel figures prominently in the issue that Patrick Harvie raised. What discussions has the First Minister had with the UK Government about the situation of young people in Dungavel?

The First Minister: I intend to hold such discussions with the UK Government as soon as we get the institutions established that will enable them to properly take place.

Given that there is a substantial feeling that the Home Office and the BIA have not been as quick as they should have been in implementing the agreement, it is a priority that we ensure that there is no suggestion that any institution, council or governmental body in Scotland can be accused of foot dragging. I know that there is concern about the issue right across the Parliament and I assure Hugh O'Donnell that, through the proposed institutions, I will do everything that I can to continue to pursue the issue until the blot and stain of dawn raids is removed from our country.

Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP): Does the First Minister share my concern about the plight of Sana Hussein and her four children, one of whom is a nine-month-old baby, who were taken to Dungavel on Friday and then had to suffer being transported by van to Tinsley house—a journey of 14 hours—on Sunday? Does he agree that that is totally unacceptable? Will he join me in welcoming Sana, who was released yesterday and who phoned me last night, back to Glasgow?

The First Minister: I share Sandra White's concern, I join her in welcoming Sana Hussein back to Glasgow and I pay tribute to her extensive work on the issue.

When people consider the general issue of asylum seekers and dawn raids, they sometimes think that there is logic and sense behind some of the attitudes that have emanated from the Home Office. However, I suspect that when people look at specific cases—when the issue boils down to individual families and individual children—and become aware of the circumstances of many of the families and children concerned, their opinion changes quite dramatically. Sandra White does well to bring to the Parliament one such case and I salute what she says.

Policing

6. Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con): To ask the First Minister whether the Scottish Government is committed to the provision of an additional 1,000 officers for front-line policing. (S3F-79)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): We are committed to delivering. That will require a co-ordinated, carefully planned and innovative approach. Plans to deliver our commitment are being drawn up and we will publish them in early course.

Bill Aitken: I am grateful for that reassurance. Does the First Minister agree that the public want the additional police officers to be occupied on the front line providing a visible and tangible deterrent and investigating crime? That being the case, does he agree that, bearing in mind the significant costs involved, the best solution might be to invite joint police boards to apply for the additional moneys, subject to schemes being approved by the Scottish Executive to ensure that the money will be used for the intended purpose—namely, front-line policing—rather than for administrative purposes?

The First Minister: I share Bill Aitken's concern. It would be useful to take up those matters in discussion with the Cabinet Secretary for Justice. We have the same objective, which is to get more front-line police on to the streets in communities throughout Scotland. The main thing is that we work constructively to achieve the implementation of that shared objective.

I rather liked the remarks that Jackson Carlaw made during the safer and stronger debate about the 1,500 additional officers that the Conservative party had committed to provide and the 1,000 additional officers that the SNP had promised. He said:

"It would be interesting to know how the SNP arrived at its requirement figure; come to that, it would be interesting to know how we arrived at ours."—[*Official Report*, 6 June 2007; c 421-22.]

Discussion all round with people who want to achieve the objective of putting more police on the streets in communities throughout Scotland is

what is called for, so that together we can deliver on that commitment.

Paul Martin (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab): Following on from the quotation that the First Minister read out, does he agree that the Executive would be in breach of the Police (Scotland) Act 1967 if it placed police officers in our communities, as the act states that chief constables have the sole responsibility for operational decisions about police deployment and enforcing law in their areas?

The First Minister: I cannot imagine that any chief constable in Scotland would disagree with the proposition that they should have the resources to put more policemen on to the streets and into the communities of Scotland.

Point of Order

12:30

Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I seek your guidance on the potential misuse of holding replies to written questions, as I am informed that the figure for such replies currently stands at 40 per cent.

Later today we will have a sadly foreshortened debate on a critical area of action for Scotland—housing. The Presiding Officer may be aware of the anxieties of Labour members and in our communities about the lack of interest that the SNP Scottish Executive has shown in housing and the low priority that it has given to the issue. I lodged a series of questions about meetings that ministers have held with organisations that are interested in housing; I also asked what meetings were planned. Being a reasonable person, I did not list a range of housing organisations, groups and—crucially—tenants who might reasonably expect to meet the Minister for Communities and Sport.

On 6 June, I lodged specific questions about meetings held and planned with two organisations—the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations and Shelter. Yesterday—on 20 June—I received a number of holding replies to those questions from Stewart Maxwell, which stated that the minister would reply as soon as possible. Collating the information that I requested is a simple task. Is it reasonable for the minister to withhold that information ahead of today's debate on housing, given that the answers might have given us at least a sense of how much ministerial priority has been given to housing in the Executive's first weeks?

Presiding Officer, if, as I suspect, the answer to the questions is "none", will you outline what action you will take against a minister who either seems wilfully to have misused the holding reply system to resist providing relevant information ahead of a debate in the Parliament, or is claiming to need more than 14 days to add up to zero?

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): Despite the barracking that is taking place, the member has a perfectly reasonable point of order. I thank her for giving me advance notice of it. In this case, the rules have clearly been complied with, as answers—albeit holding answers—were provided within the deadlines. However, if possible, substantive answers should always be provided by the due date. I ask the Executive to reflect on that point.

Before I suspend the meeting, I ask members who are staying for the awards ceremony that will

follow to remain in their seats. Other members should leave as rapidly as possible.

12:33

Meeting suspended until 14:15.

14:15

On resuming—

Points of Order

Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I regret very much that I have again to take up chamber time. My point of order is further to the point of order that I raised earlier, and I thank you for your earlier response.

I was anxious that I may have understated or overstated my case in respect of the degree of concern that I have about the use of holding replies. However, as I left the chamber, a colleague told me that a journalist had advised him that a housing document would be issued this afternoon. As I have had no notice of or warning about the document, I asked the Scottish Parliament information centre whether a housing document was to be issued. SPICe said that it could not tell me, but that a document had been embargoed until 2.30 this afternoon. I repeat that I was not aware of any such document although I am the shadow housing spokesperson.

I went back to my desk and prepared to write my speech. I was so inspired by the issue of housing that I thought that I had better check my e-mails. I discovered that there were, in fact, written answers to the questions to which holding replies had been issued yesterday afternoon.

As you will recall, Presiding Officer, earlier I questioned the difficulty in answering a question about how many meetings ministers had had with organisations and when meetings were planned. At 1.30 this afternoon, the following statement was issued by Mr Maxwell:

"The Government will announce today a number of proposals for tackling Scotland's housing problems. I have spoken to the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations today, and in the coming weeks will discuss with them and others with an interest in the future of Scotland's housing how to take forward these proposals."

The statement is repeated in relation to Shelter: the minister has

"spoken to Shelter, informed it of the statement and will work with it in future."

It is a matter of grave regret and seriousness for Parliament that the SNP's housing spokesperson regards the chamber as being entirely irrelevant in the shaping of housing policy. I suspect that the new Administration does not reflect properly on past practice in the Parliament. In eight years of housing policy in the Parliament, we have built consensus and secured a real difference. However, statements are now being issued with no warning given—except to journalists and lobbying organisations. There is no opportunity to

scrutinise those statements and there is malevolent use of the holding replies system to ensure the best possible timing.

Presiding Officer, I would ask you to reflect on the possibility of calling the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing to the chamber to discuss the answer as a matter of urgency, but Ms Sturgeon is so little interested in Scotland's housing issues that she is in London, speaking to English health authorities. That is a matter of regret. I therefore ask you to call Mr Maxwell to account for this disgraceful attitude to the chamber and his ridiculous way of dealing with the proper approach to the matter. I do not want to intervene in this afternoon's abridged debate and I hope that you will take this matter extremely seriously.

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): I assure the member that I take the matter extremely seriously and I thank her for her point of order. Substantive issues are involved, so I hope that she will forgive me if I do not respond instantly. I would like a little time to think about the matter, and I will come back to the chamber with my thoughts on it before decision time this evening.

Hugh Henry (Paisley South) (Lab): Further to that point of order, Presiding Officer, when you reflect on the matter, will you also consider Johann Lamont's request that the minister come to the chamber to give an explanation?

The Presiding Officer: I have said that I will reflect on the points that Johann Lamont raised.

Question Time

SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

Education and Lifelong Learning

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): Question 1 has been withdrawn.

Play

2. Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive how it will develop purposeful play for primary 1 pupils. (S3O-313)

The Minister for Children and Early Years (Adam Ingram): We have recently published guidance on active learning in the early years of primary as part of the development of the curriculum for excellence. That document aims to support authorities, schools and early years establishments to review their practice and to develop a more active approach to learning in the early years and beyond.

Patricia Ferguson: Will the minister continue the good work that was begun by the previous Administration and take forward the idea of purposeful play, particularly for primary 1 pupils? Children enter our primary schools at a relatively young and tender age, and for many of them the transition can be difficult. We in the Labour Party believe that purposeful play can help children to integrate properly into primary schools. Will the minister give a commitment to develop that agenda further in the coming years as the good results that will undoubtedly come from it become clear?

Adam Ingram: The early level of the curriculum for excellence will provide a smoother transition from pre-school to primary 1. As the member knows, local authorities are working hard to consider what changes they need to make to primary 1 to support the use of more active learning. That includes consideration of staffing arrangements, on which the Labour Party was particularly keen during yesterday's debate.

I am confident that the 300 additional teachers that the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning announced yesterday for pre-school and early primary education, together with the additional resources that she announced for pre-school education, will give local authorities significant scope to provide the staffing and other resources that are needed to assist with the important transition from pre-school to primary, with a particular focus on deprived areas.

Hugh O'Donnell (Central Scotland) (LD): It is encouraging to hear both the minister and the

Labour Party adopt Liberal Democrat policy. That is a positive step.

As Lloyd George said in 1926,

"play is the child's first claim on the community."

How will the minister work with the statutory education sector and the voluntary sector—particularly Play Scotland and Barnardo's—in taking forward this strategic development?

Adam Ingram: I am aware of the role that the voluntary sector can play. Indeed, we had an interesting meeting last night with many of the stakeholders in the area. I am very much in favour of moving in that direction.

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab): Given yesterday's debate and the prominence that the Administration intends to give early years education, does the minister plan to introduce qualified early years teachers to primary 1 or early years education?

Adam Ingram: I refer the member to my answer to Ms Ferguson's question. It is up to local authorities to deploy the resources that are at their command. A number of local authorities, particularly in Ayrshire, are introducing early years workers in their primary 1 classes. I will look at those developments with interest and, if they prove as successful as I expect them to be, we can pass that good practice on throughout the system.

Crichton Campus

3. Derek Brownlee (South of Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it would accept an academic strategy for the Crichton campus in Dumfries that did not include the continued participation of the University of Glasgow or included a reduced role for the university. (S3O-268)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Fiona Hyslop): I support the work to develop the academic strategy, which will inform future actions to achieve sustainable provision that meets the academic and economic needs of the area. The Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council and the Scottish Executive continue to work closely and urgently with all the academic partners that are involved in developing the strategy, including the University of Glasgow.

I met the Scottish funding council and the principal of the University of Glasgow on 4 June to progress the interests of students and potential students at the Crichton campus. In developing the strategy, a number of options are being explored to build on existing provision at the campus and to develop new provision.

Derek Brownlee: The First Minister will have received yesterday a petition urging that the University of Glasgow continue its participation. In a written answer to me, the cabinet secretary said:

"The Scottish Executive is an active member of the group working to produce the academic strategy."—[*Official Report, Written Answers*, 6 June 2007; S3W-109.]

Is it too much to ask whether the Executive thinks that it is acceptable for that strategy to include a diminished or non-existent role for the University of Glasgow?

Fiona Hyslop: I am sure that, like me, the member respects the independence of academic institutions such as universities. The Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 2005 makes it clear that it is not within the gift of ministers to direct universities, which are independent institutions, to carry out particular academic strategies. However, we are contributing to the strategy and I am committed to ensuring that we provide the best opportunities that we can provide at the Crichton campus. I will use my influence as much as I can to get the best result. I ask the member to bear with me; I am pursuing the case vigorously.

Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab): I wish to press the minister further. Has the Scottish funding council allocated any additional funding to the University of Glasgow to enable it to continue its undergraduate provision at Crichton? Have any additional fully funded higher education places been allocated to the Crichton campus? Has the University of Glasgow agreed to revoke its suspension of undergraduate admissions? Bearing in mind the fact that the academic strategy was under development at the end of last year, has any progress been made on the aforementioned issues since the debates in February and March?

Fiona Hyslop: Yes, significant progress has been made but I am not at liberty to talk about the detail at this stage. When I can, I will. I know that Elaine Murray, the Presiding Officer and many others in the chamber have an interest in the issue.

There is an issue that involves the other partners in the Crichton campus and progressing the funding of additional places. It is essential for the overall development of the Crichton campus that we move on the academic strategy, which has several strands. We are all aware of other issues, particularly that involving the University of Glasgow. I ask members to be patient; I reiterate that I am actively pursuing those issues.

Alasdair Morgan (South of Scotland) (SNP): Does the minister agree that any academic strategy that does not cater for higher education courses in non-science subjects would be

unacceptable to the people of the south-west of Scotland? Further, given that such courses have been introduced, does she agree that it would be even more unacceptable for them to be taken away?

Fiona Hyslop: Members are free to express their views on that, and from the petition that was received this week, I know that what Mr Morgan said is true. We can try to ensure that the strategic direction of higher education, as steered and led by the Executive, reflects the opportunities that should be provided to people in all parts of Scotland, regardless of geography or deprivation, so that current and future students can access the type of course that they deserve.

Class Sizes

4. Jim Hume (South of Scotland) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it will fulfil the manifesto commitment to reduce all primary 1, 2 and 3 class sizes to 18 pupils. (S3O-296)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Fiona Hyslop): Yes.

Jim Hume: I thank the cabinet secretary for her in-depth answer.

Will the cabinet secretary assure us that the additional teachers, classroom assistants and classrooms needed to accommodate the changes will be in place and that her department will be able to pay for them?

Fiona Hyslop: Yesterday's announcement made it quite clear that, within weeks of coming to power, our injection of 550 new teachers into the system is an early step towards ensuring that we deliver. Obviously, we need to spend capital as well, which is why we have released an additional £40 million into the school fund. Considerable progress will have to be made year on year if we are to deliver, which is why elements of the budget following the comprehensive spending review will indicate how far and fast we can deliver. We are absolutely determined to ensure that our young people in primary 1, 2 and 3 benefit from receiving their teaching in classes of 18.

Elizabeth Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Does the cabinet secretary have any idea how many extra teachers and classrooms will be required, assuming that the SNP manifesto commitment is realised?

Fiona Hyslop: We will have to engage proactively with councils on classrooms, because local authorities—not the Executive—are the owners, employers and providers of the schools that can deliver. We have already started the process to deliver on the classroom agenda.

As far as resources are concerned, we are undertaking a modelling exercise that bears in

mind falling school rolls and retirements. We envisage that far more than the 1,000 teachers pledged by Labour and the Liberal Democrats are needed and that the number could at least double if not treble. Our proposal of having 550 new teachers this autumn will go a good way towards delivering the numbers. However, it is a big commitment, which means that we have to act wisely and look at future budgets—not just in the week ahead but in the year ahead, following the comprehensive spending review.

Hugh Henry (Paisley South) (Lab): When will Fiona Hyslop deliver her manifesto commitment? Before she made her announcement to Parliament, she spoke on BBC radio yesterday about taking a commonsense approach and having flexibility. Until the election, she made great play of there being no flexibility on maths and English class sizes. Will she confirm that there will be no flexibility on having only 20 to a class for maths and English?

Fiona Hyslop: Perhaps Hugh Henry does not recall that, when he was Minister for Education and Young People and I was Opposition spokesperson, I commented that flexibility was needed when class sizes were reduced from 33 to 30 in the first session of the Scottish Parliament, and I recommended that flexibility would be needed to achieve class sizes of 20. Of course we need to take a commonsense, flexible approach. We will deliver on our commitment, but it is important that we engage with and listen to councils to make sure that we can deliver what they need and not take the top-down approach that was adopted by the previous Government.

The Presiding Officer: Question 5 has been withdrawn.

New Schools

6. Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it will aim to build 250 new schools during this parliamentary session. (S3O-331)

The Minister for Schools and Skills (Maureen Watt): We have a clear manifesto commitment to match the school building investment plans that were in place prior to the election. Beyond that, we wish to consider with authorities in the context of the spending review the feasible scale and timescale of the next stages of the school building programme.

Ken Macintosh: We all remember that commitment, which was to match our promise brick for brick. However, from what the minister says, that commitment no longer seems to hold true. Is she aware that many local authorities will look for an announcement from the Administration to tell them how or whether they can progress their

plans to refurbish or upgrade many schools throughout the country? Will she say when we can expect an announcement on the detail of the new school building programme and whether a specific target will be set as part of that programme?

Maureen Watt: As we have said, both during the election and since, we intend to match the previous Executive's school building programme brick for brick—we are committed to doing so. As Ken Macintosh knows, local authorities are responsible for the management of their school estate and the decision to refurbish or replace schools lies entirely with them. When local authorities present their proposals, we will look at them in the context of matching the previous Executive's proposals brick for brick.

Discipline

7. Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive how it will improve standards of discipline in schools. (S3O-260)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Fiona Hyslop): The Scottish Government is committed to helping schools create and maintain a peaceful and positive learning environment for all. That includes smaller class sizes, which teachers say will be a significant factor in tackling indiscipline. We will also develop new guidelines on approaches that promote positive behaviour and on dealing with more serious indiscipline.

Murdo Fraser: I am sure that the cabinet secretary agrees with me that in order to understand the discipline problem, statistics must be published. I know that she agrees with me about that because when she was in opposition, she called for the publication of statistics and said:

"regular statistics should be produced so that there can be accountability."—[*Official Report*, 17 March 2005; c 15454.]

The cabinet secretary told my colleague Elizabeth Smith during yesterday's debate that she was committed to looking at "options" only, rather than publishing statistics. Will she tell us why she has changed her mind?

Fiona Hyslop: It is important that we have robust and accurate statistics on which people can be held to account. There has been some reflection on the point because I have concerns about the robustness of the statistics that were produced annually. There is no point collecting statistics if they are of no use to Government because there are different interpretations of them from teacher to teacher, school to school and local authority to local authority.

I want robust information. As I have said, I am happy to engage with the Conservatives on how we move forward. I quote from my letter to Elizabeth Smith:

"Once I have obtained the cost and impact of instituting a new national collation of data on indiscipline on an annual basis in addition to or instead of more in depth studies, I would like to discuss options with you as well as educational professionals in deciding the best way forward."

That is the best way forward.

Schools (Funding)

8. Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what steps it will take to address any inequalities in school funding across local authority areas. (S3O-281)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Fiona Hyslop): The Scottish Government distributes the bulk of funding to councils through the core local government finance settlement, on a basis that is agreed between the Executive and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. Local authorities then set their own budgets for services, including education, and have discretion to allocate moneys as they judge those moneys are needed to deliver service priorities in their areas.

Kenneth Gibson: The funding of individual secondary schools can fluctuate dramatically, even within local authority areas, although headteachers are equally accountable. Given that, does the cabinet secretary agree with the Headteachers Association of Scotland that all schools that are under democratic control should be funded under a commonly agreed basic formula that allows for rurality and deprivation when appropriate, to minimise the likelihood of students receiving an education that may suffer from what is in effect a postcode lottery for resources?

Fiona Hyslop: I appreciate headteachers' concerns, but we must reflect the accountability and democratic responsibility of individual local authorities for governing their educational provision and their schools. I acknowledge that we must have a fair, open and accountable system for funding schools, to ensure that schools that are in particular need because of deprivation or rurality, for example, have the resources that they require. We must also ensure that schools that deploy their funds successfully are not unnecessarily penalised for that.

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): The cabinet secretary has announced additional funding, which will be used to pilot additional resources to achieve class sizes of 18. When will Scottish Borders Council be

included in funding support for the reduced class sizes to which she has given a commitment? As she is aware, people in the Scottish Borders have low incomes and the situation is compounded by rurality. If my constituents in the Borders were left out of the pilot, would that not be a scandal? When will the pilot end?

Fiona Hyslop: It is regrettable that previous Governments' management of the economy has left the Scottish Borders as one of the lowest-income areas in the country. That is why, as we are to deploy 300 new teachers in the system in August—in a matter of weeks—it is important that Scottish Borders Council makes representations to our officials as soon as possible, so that they can ensure that the Scottish Borders benefits from the 300 new teachers who will be provided. Information on areas of deprivation suggests that the Scottish Borders has a strong case for early receipt of the new teachers.

The Presiding Officer: I have divided between the two themes for questions the time that we lost to points of order earlier, so we move now to questions on Europe, external affairs and culture.

Europe, External Affairs and Culture

European Engagement

1. John Park (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive when its Cabinet will next discuss engagement with Europe. (S3O-339)

The Minister for Europe, External Affairs and Culture (Linda Fabiani): The Scottish Cabinet regularly discusses issues that relate to engagement with Europe and European Union aspects of Scottish Government policy. However, the Scottish ministers operate on the basis of collective responsibility and do not disclose details of their private deliberations or of what they will or will not discuss at Cabinet.

John Park: Oh—I thank the minister for that detail.

We have heard much in this parliamentary session about red tape and burdens on business, but does the minister acknowledge that the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development lists Scotland, as part of the United Kingdom, as the second-least regulated country in the OECD?

I am interested in whether the Cabinet will discuss its approach to EU directives in the near future. For example, I would like a specific answer, if possible, on whether the minister supports the extension of information and consultation rights, which would benefit thousands of Scottish workers.

Linda Fabiani: I do not know whether I managed to note all Mr Park's points, but I presume that he was referring from a Scottish Trades Union Congress perspective to the Lisbon agenda in particular. He will know that the previous session's European and External Relations Committee, of which I was the convener, took strong evidence from the STUC on that issue.

There are contradictory views on whether business in Scotland is underregulated or overregulated. I hope that the new European and External Relations Committee and the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee will discuss the matter further. The Scottish ministers take the economy seriously and will, no doubt, discuss the issues that have been raised by Mr Park.

European Council

2. Iain Smith (North East Fife) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive what discussions it has had with the United Kingdom Government in advance of the European Council meeting in Brussels on 21 and 22 June 2007. (S3O-286)

The Minister for Europe, External Affairs and Culture (Linda Fabiani): I confirm that the Scottish Government has been in discussion with the UK Government in advance of the European Council meeting of 21 and 22 June. Indeed, I represented the Scottish Government at the meeting of the joint ministerial committee on the European Union on 5 June, which was attended by UK Government ministers and ministers from the Northern Ireland Executive.

Iain Smith: I am sure that the minister will agree that one of the key issues that is to be debated at that European Council meeting and the subsequent intergovernmental conference is the draft reform treaty, which will introduce some of the important institutional reforms that were to be part of the European constitution before it fell by the wayside. Does the minister agree that it is vital for Scotland that some of those reforms take place, so that we have a European Union that operates on the basis of conferral and acts only when it has specific powers to do so; that subsidiarity is a key part of the European Union; that it should operate only within those competencies—

The Presiding Officer: Briefly, please.

Iain Smith: I am asking whether the minister agrees with these points.

The Presiding Officer: You could still make it a brief question, Mr Smith.

Iain Smith: Does the minister agree that one of the key aspects of the EU constitution that has been lost is the draft protocol on subsidiarity,

which recognised the role of sub-national Parliaments such as the Scottish Parliament?

Linda Fabiani: I do not have time to address all the issues that Mr Smith raised. I hope that when I meet the European and External Relations Committee, of which he is a member, we will be able to discuss the issues further.

We can properly answer questions regarding what is happening with the constitution only when there is a text to refer to. We must wait and see how the German presidency proposes to take the issue forward, which I presume will be through the intergovernmental conference that Mr Smith mentioned. We are keen to see subsidiarity working properly, including within the UK. I encourage the Parliament to press the Westminster Parliament to share information fully in that regard. Members will have heard the First Minister talk earlier about the extension of EU competencies, particularly in the area of justice and home affairs. We will watch that closely, and we expect co-operation from the Westminster Government on that to ensure that Scotland's interests are taken fully into account.

Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind): I ask the minister whether the issue of energy appears anywhere in the draft treaty that is being prepared. If it does appear, will she promise the chamber that she will vote against any European competency over energy policy? Will she undertake to find out the will of the Parliament before she enters further discussions?

Linda Fabiani: An SNP Government will always put the interests of Scotland first, and an SNP Government will always take into account the views of the Parliament on such issues, through its committees and plenary chamber.

Ted Brocklebank (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Given her party leader's well-known obsession with referenda, can the minister tell us whether the SNP has any plans for a referendum in Scotland to oppose any deal that the Prime Minister signs up to at the European Council if it breaches what the First Minister earlier referred to as his "red-line issues"?

Linda Fabiani: As I said, we can comment properly on such issues only when there is a text to comment on. However, it is clear from SNP policy that we will support referenda on constitutional issues. I am afraid that until we see the results of the current discussions and the intergovernmental conference that is likely to follow, we will not know whether there will be any constitutional reforms that require referenda.

Irene Oldfather (Cunninghame South) (Lab): On treaty reform, can the minister advise us whether withdrawal of the common fisheries policy will be a red-line issue for the SNP, as it has

indicated in the past? Can she assure the Parliament that the 250,000 Scottish manufacturing jobs that depend on exports to Europe will not be put at risk by anything that her party does in relation to red-line issues?

Linda Fabiani: We have always been clear about the importance of fisheries to Scotland and the Scottish economy. Indeed, fisheries was a red-line issue during the most recent discussions. We do not yet know what will come out of the European Council meeting, but I assure the member that we will always put first the interests of Scotland, her fishermen and her fisheries.

United Kingdom Government (Relations)

3. Jackson Carlaw (West of Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive what plans it has for a more formal and structured relationship between it and the UK Government. (S3O-272)

The Minister for Europe, External Affairs and Culture (Linda Fabiani): We plan to press for reactivation of the joint ministerial committee structure.

Jackson Carlaw: I had planned to say, "I thank the minister for her reply," but her answer was a bit limited.

Does the minister accept that the shambles that led to the First Minister making an emergency statement to the Parliament a fortnight ago was brought about, in part, by a lack of preparedness and the absence of an expectation at Westminster that there would or even could be a change of Government in Scotland? I urge her to ensure that she and her colleagues are not found wanting on the same charge, therefore I encourage them to establish positive working relationships with the Conservatives at Westminster, who will most likely form the next Government, when and if Gordon Brown finds the courage to secure a legitimate mandate. Perhaps she should have a draft letter standing by.

Linda Fabiani: I thank my friend Hugh O'Donnell for telling me to keep a straight face—I will do that. I agree that the way in which the Westminster Government dealt with the Scottish Government recently was shambolic. I have every faith in the First Minister of Scotland to be smart enough not to allow that to happen to him.

Dumfries House

4. Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it recognises the cultural and historical importance of Dumfries house and its contents and whether it considers that opening the house to the public has the potential to provide the communities of East Ayrshire with a significant regeneration boost. (S3O-262)

The Minister for Europe, External Affairs and Culture (Linda Fabiani): I understand the value of Dumfries house. I have not yet seen a business plan that demonstrates that opening the house to the public would offer a significant economic benefit, but I do not want to prejudge the possibility of such a plan being developed.

Jamie McGrigor: Does the minister acknowledge that the majority of the money that is needed to save Dumfries house for the public has been raised privately? Indeed, an individual has pledged £5 million to match possible support from the Scottish Executive. Does she agree that the communities of East Ayrshire could gain significant benefit from having what would be a top United Kingdom tourist attraction, which would give the whole area a much-needed economic boost?

Linda Fabiani: All that I can do is repeat what I have already said—I have not yet seen a business plan that demonstrates that opening the house to the public would offer a significant economic benefit, but I do not want to prejudge the possibility of such a plan being developed.

Cathy Jamieson (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab): History is being made, in that Jamie McGrigor and I have formed a coalition to ask the minister questions about the same issue.

I am rather surprised that the minister says that she does not want to prejudge the possibility of a business plan for Dumfries house being developed—although I hope that she will keep that option open—given what she said in her letter of 13 June. She accepted that the house and its collection were valuable heritage for the local area, but indicated that the cost of acquisition would be so high that it would not be affordable for the Scottish Executive when there were so many other priorities. She also said that she did not envisage intervening.

I ask the minister to provide absolute clarity on her position. From speaking to the Marquis of Bute this week, I understand that there is still a window of opportunity for the minister to pick up the phone and get people round the table in an effort to save the proposed scheme and to ensure that the house becomes the centrepiece of a regeneration project for East Ayrshire. Will the minister learn from her colleagues by changing her mind, adopting a different position from the one that she adopted in her letter and doing the right thing, which is to support my constituents and the other people who want to save the house for the nation?

Linda Fabiani: Discussion about the potential sale of the property and its contents has been going on for some years. In 2004, the National Trust for Scotland made an offer, which was rejected.

Historic Scotland has a total grants budget of £12 million. The Government must be careful how it spends the money that is available for heritage. I can only reiterate that I have not yet seen a business plan that demonstrates that opening the house to the public would have a significant economic benefit. However, I will not prejudge the possibility of such a plan being developed.

The Presiding Officer: Question 5 is withdrawn.

Artists Grants Scheme

6. Andy Kerr (East Kilbride) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive how it will define “artists” in relation to the manifesto proposal for a new grants scheme for artists. (S3O-324)

The Minister for Europe, External Affairs and Culture (Linda Fabiani): I thank Andy Kerr for almost giving me notice of the question when he phoned me by mistake last week. Unfortunately, he did not tell me what his supplementary was going to be. I am considering an appropriate definition of “artists”, which is needed for the operation of the proposed scheme.

Andy Kerr: It is reassuring that some members of the Labour Party do call on occasion. Whether they do so by accident is another matter entirely. I was concerned by the narrow definition of “artists” in the proposals in the SNP manifesto, which suggested that only those earning revenue from their work at this time would benefit from the proposed tax concession. I am concerned about how the minister will support aspiring artists who may not yet be in a position to put product material and their creative work on the market, to allow them to generate income. I asked about the definition because it appears that only artists who are earning now will benefit from the grant scheme that is described in the SNP manifesto.

Linda Fabiani: Mr Kerr and I are thinking along the same lines. In an overall arts and culture policy, it is important to ensure both that emerging artists and those who are earning are treated well and appropriately, to ensure that their art is able to flourish, which is why I do not want to define quickly what we mean by “artists”. I am considering the issue carefully and I am taking advice on it. I am looking closely at the Irish artists exemption model and at how other countries define “artists”. The report of the Cultural Commission in 2005 showed clearly that a number of definitions and models are employed. So that no one is disadvantaged and that we do our best to boost the arts in this country, I intend to take advice and to make decisions once we have all the advice that is necessary.

European Union States (Diplomatic Discussions)

7. Mr Frank McAveety (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what discussions it has had with embassy representatives and consulate officials of EU states on issues of mutual interest. (S3O-328)

The Minister for Europe, External Affairs and Culture (Linda Fabiani): Scottish ministers have already met informally a number of diplomatic and official representatives of European Union member states. Officials frequently discuss issues of mutual interest with consular and embassy officials from countries in the European Union.

Mr McAveety: I raise with the minister concerns that some of my constituents have expressed about the capacity of many communities to cope with substantial numbers of EU economic migrants in their area. Is the Scottish Executive willing to explore ways in which embassy representatives and consulate officials can take greater responsibility for working with agencies in Scotland on issues such as the substantial presence of Slovak economic migrants in the Govanhill area of my constituency, who are putting tremendous pressure on our education services, and on issues of community safety and integration?

Linda Fabiani: People are aware of the issues to which the member refers, as they are raised fairly regularly. I would be glad to meet Mr McAveety to learn of the direct experience of the area that he represents.

Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab): In the course of the meetings that have taken place, have the minister or her officials had an opportunity to discuss with embassy representatives or consulate officials of other EU states the fact that the information and consultation directive, to which my colleague John Park referred, has already been agreed? What action will the Government take to ensure that Scottish companies that breach the directive, such as Simclar in my colleague Irene Oldfather’s constituency, are brought to book under its terms?

Linda Fabiani: I found it unfortunate that when ministers in a previous Administration answered questions to which they were not entirely sure of the answer they instantly resorted to political attacks. I will not do that. I do not know enough about the situation to which the member has referred to be able to give her a definitive answer. However, I assure her that she will have that answer from me very quickly in writing.

The Presiding Officer: As we started late, I will allow one more question.

Members of the European Parliament

8. Angela Constance (Livingston) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive how it will respond to proposals by the Electoral Commission to reduce the number of members of the European Parliament who represent Scotland from seven to six at the 2009 European elections. (S3O-284)

The Minister for Europe, External Affairs and Culture (Linda Fabiani): The Scottish Government opposes any reduction in the number of MEPs representing Scotland. The distinctive political and legal circumstances in which those MEPs work is an issue that we will raise in contacts with the Electoral Commission and the United Kingdom Government.

Angela Constance: I thank the minister for her comments and support on this matter. Given that the proposal would downgrade Scotland's representation in Europe to half of that enjoyed by other similarly sized European nations, what will she do to generate the general public's support on this issue?

Linda Fabiani: Angela Constance is quite right. The fact that Scotland's MEPs operate within very particular circumstances, many of which are to do with the country's separate political and legal systems, merits the UK Government considering whether the current legislation is appropriate. The Scottish Government will make those points in its response to the Electoral Commission and in separate representations to the Secretary of State for Justice.

Climate Change

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): The next item of business is a statement by John Swinney on climate change. As the minister will take questions at the end of his statement, there should be no interventions.

14:57

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): Unchecked climate change is one of the most serious threats that we face. It is not simply an environmental challenge; it threatens people, our economies, our societies and, indeed, our very existence. The challenge transcends all traditional boundaries. Climate change is a truly global issue, and it can be tackled only if all of us in Parliament, in Scotland, in the United Kingdom and around the world work together.

We recognise that every country has a responsibility to take action to cut emissions and that different actions will be appropriate for different countries. We must therefore make our contribution to the international effort by taking the action that is required for Scotland.

Climate change is not just a threat for the future—Scotland is already feeling its effects in, for example, increased frequency and intensity of rainfall. This Government wants Scotland to show leadership in tackling climate change; indeed, we pledged in our manifesto to introduce ambitious legislation to tackle the problem, and other parties made similar commitments. It is now the time for action.

Today, I am pleased to announce the Government's intention to introduce a Scottish climate change bill, which will set mandatory targets for emissions reductions; include monitoring arrangements to ensure that we are on course to meet those targets; and set out mechanisms to ensure that we achieve and are accountable for our long-term goals. We will also use the opportunity that will be provided by the bill to introduce other compatible legislative measures.

Our planned bill will set a mandatory long-term target of an 80 per cent reduction in our emissions by 2050, which is equivalent to an emissions reduction of 3 per cent each year. To ensure sustained progress towards that goal, we will consult on proposals in the bill to introduce targets based on average annual reductions over a five-year period. That means that each year we will be held to account on the trend of emissions reductions.

Scottish ministers must be accountable for their actions. We intend future legislation to set out

mandatory requirements for reporting to Parliament on performance in achieving the targets. There should be a vigorous parliamentary process that fully involves the committees and the Parliament in assessing the Government's performance in tackling this issue.

The Government will propose that the bill include a statutory and mandatory process of parliamentary accountability for ministers if emissions reduction targets are not met. The Government sees no value in creating a structure of penalty fines to be paid in the event of such failure, but feels that an effective and demanding process of parliamentary scrutiny will provide the most effective way of focusing minds on delivery. A key aspect of that would be a requirement for ministers to identify the compensating action to be taken to remedy any failures to perform.

New policies will be needed to meet the 2050 target and to move us along the trajectory towards it. The legislation will therefore need to introduce new powers to deliver such policies in the future through secondary legislation.

We recognise that we will need independent expert advice to inform the targets and the climate change policies. At this stage, there are two options for obtaining expert advice: either we could establish a Scottish committee of climate change experts to fulfil the role, or we could obtain the services of the United Kingdom climate change committee that UK ministers intend to establish. Over the coming months, we will consult on how best to meet Scotland's needs for that expert advice and we will reflect the outcome of that consultation in our bill. In addition to including measures that will bring about a reduction in emissions, we intend our legislation to include measures to help us adapt to the unavoidable impacts of climate change.

Earlier in my statement I made it clear that we are already wrestling with a number of consequences of climate change. The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment, who is working closely with me on the matter but who is unable to be here today due to his presence at the Royal Highland show, has had to wrestle with the problem of significant flooding in his Moray constituency, as I have had to do in my North Tayside constituency. Increased risk of flooding is one of the ways in which climate change will manifest itself in Scotland, but the legislation that deals with flood alleviation is inadequate and needs to be updated. I am therefore pleased to announce that flood-risk management will also be consulted on, with a view to legislation. The Government will take forward the consultation exercises together, but we reserve our position to legislate separately if

legislative proposals on either climate change or flood alleviation can be considered more swiftly.

I emphasise that our bill will not just be about regulation and reductions. We will propose a framework in which Scottish industries can invest with certainty in world-beating low-carbon technologies. That is why we want Scotland to become a global leader in developing solutions to the challenge of climate change. It is why we want Scotland to become the pre-eminent location for clean energy research and development in Europe and why we want Scotland to become the green energy capital of Europe. The bill could provide huge opportunities for our economy by providing business with the certainty that it needs for investment decisions.

Our plans for a Scottish climate change bill are ambitious and we accept that meeting the ambitious targets is a huge challenge. We are under no illusions about the level, breadth and depth of action that is required, which is why in moving forward we need to build a broad parliamentary and national consensus so that we can realise our ambitions and capitalise on our opportunities.

We intend to have a full and open consultation on the bill in Parliament and beyond. The targets will set the framework for policy long after most of us have left Parliament. We must make the right choices—we believe that such choices are best made through discussion and engagement to deliver consensus.

We have started that process by working to establish consensus across every political party. The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change, Stewart Stevenson, has already met spokespeople from the other parties in Parliament. We are encouraged by the recognition of, and commitment to, tackling climate change that we have heard during those discussions. I hope that other members will similarly be able to offer their support to the principles of our planned bill. I say "principles" because the bill must be a product of all our contributions to the debate. We do not have all the answers about how to meet the targets, so we welcome good ideas from all sources.

I know that my announcement today has been eagerly awaited by many people. I must, however, caution people that it will take some time to take the process forward: this is a long-term effort. We must build consensus in support of our proposals and we must carry out the detailed consultation that is required for formulation of our proposed bill. It is not possible to give a date for the introduction of the bill in advance of those processes—we might not be able to introduce the bill to Parliament until late 2008. Having studied the detailed processes that are required, I assure

Parliament that that timetable looks the most realistic. However, I also assure Parliament that the Government will do everything it can to accelerate the timetable.

I mentioned earlier that the Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change has had initial discussions with spokespeople from other parties. We will begin informal talks with other stakeholders over the coming weeks and we will begin formal consultation at the earliest opportunity. I assure Parliament that we will not wait to take action until the introduction of the bill. We acknowledge the previous Administration's good work in tackling climate change, in particular in committing Scotland to go beyond its equitable share of the UK's emissions reduction targets. Our intention is to build on that work and to go further, as is amply demonstrated by our commitment to the 80 per cent emissions reduction target.

As part of our approach, we intend to work constructively as part of the UK effort. David Miliband and I recognise that we need to work together on the challenges that are faced by the UK and the wider international community. On Monday, Stewart Stevenson and the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment met David Miliband, other ministers from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, and representatives of the other devolved Administrations in a constructive and helpful meeting. DEFRA ministers are keen to hear Scottish ministers' views and to ensure that there are appropriate links between the UK and Scottish bills. We intend to work with DEFRA and our colleagues in Wales and Northern Ireland to contribute to the UK emissions reduction target.

We have indicated that we want to explore how Scotland should engage with the UK draft climate change bill; how best to access the expertise and knowledge that is necessary for decision making in Scotland; how to ensure that Scotland can take full and effective action on climate change; and how to ensure that reporting mechanisms are aligned and sensible. We want to continue to build on the constructive dialogue that has taken place, to ensure that we all understand how best to help one another to help the climate.

We want our efforts to inspire others. We want to send to the rest of the world a signal of the importance that Scotland places on tackling climate change. We want to show that a prosperous and low-carbon economy is possible. We acknowledge that reducing Scotland's emissions by 80 per cent will of itself make no difference to the global environment unless similar reductions in global emissions are realised. However, by taking a lead, Scotland can demonstrate to others what can be achieved.

I believe that all members understand and recognise the need for action. I acknowledge that we might differ in our views about the detail, but it is right that we air and share those differences and I hope that we can agree on a basis for consensus to deliver our contribution to tackling a major global problem.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The minister will take statements—[*Laughter.*] Sorry. The minister will take questions on the issues that have been raised in his statement. I will allow about 30 minutes for questions, after which we will move to the next item of business. It would be helpful if members asked questions without long preambles.

Rhona Brankin (Midlothian) (Lab): I thank John Swinney for the advance copy of his statement.

Labour believes that there is a scientific consensus that the planet is getting warmer and that that poses serious dangers. We know that we must take action early and then reverse the rise in emissions. If we do not, we face potential catastrophe. That is why the previous Scottish Executive published "Changing Our Ways: Scotland's Climate Change Programme" in 2006, which reflected an ambitious, groundbreaking approach and set out for the first time the Scottish share of carbon savings. John Swinney acknowledged that work.

I welcome the cabinet secretary's statement and the fact that the Executive is working on a climate change bill. There is a general consensus about the need for legislation, which was a key plank of Labour's manifesto. Of course, the Labour Government in Westminster has published its draft climate change bill.

John Swinney talked about consensus. Will he confirm that, as part of his consensual approach, he has ditched the Scottish National Party's policy on mandatory 3 per cent annual carbon reductions? If he has, I will be satisfied that the SNP has performed yet another policy U-turn—any more U-turns and SNP ministers will have to be fitted with wing mirrors. Yet again, SNP manifesto commitments have crumbled in the face of scrutiny. Of course, SNP ministers have read the Labour manifesto and listened to Jonathan Porritt, who earlier this year described one-year targets as just "macho breast beating". The Executive now appears to be embracing five-year carbon budgeting.

Does the cabinet secretary agree that businesses in Scotland require certainty in making long-term investment decisions and that three five-year carbon budgets would be better for business than one five-year budget? Will he consult businesses to ensure that they are not

disadvantaged in comparison with their English counterparts?

Mr Swinney clearly acknowledges that actions to tackle climate change will have to be taken right across Government. Is he aware that agriculture and land use will play a vital role in tackling climate change? Does he agree with me and environmental non-governmental organisations that the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment, in his announcement on the Scottish rural development programme, failed to fund agri-environment programmes adequately, thus putting the Executive's climate change objectives at risk?

Does Mr Swinney believe that the need to reduce carbon emissions plays any part in making decisions on public transport projects? If so, he knows what my last question is.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Swinney?

John Swinney: Well—that was a rather curious end to the contribution.

I say first that I welcome the endorsement that Rhona Brankin has given our approach. I reiterate what I said earlier: we are obviously building on the work of the previous Administration, which I am happy to acknowledge.

In my statement, I said that the Government was committed to an 80 per cent reduction in our emissions by 2050. That target is equivalent to a reduction of 3 per cent each year. I could not have been clearer on the SNP Government's policy position.

Of course I am happy to consult the business community on this question; the debate will have to involve every sector of our society. If we did not involve every sector, we would have an unbalanced programme and would not be able to achieve anything like what is in the new Government's ambitious programme to intensify our efforts. The announcements that were made by the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment on the rural development programme fit very comfortably into the programme that I have announced today and into the legislation. The cabinet secretary, Mr Russell and I are working extremely closely with Stewart Stevenson to pursue the Government's agenda.

On Ms Brankin's final point about carbon emissions, every sector of our economy will have to contribute, as I have said already. Transport is an enormous contributor to carbon emissions; to tackle that problem, we will have to take a sustained and effective approach.

It is perhaps sufficient to say that Parliament will have a debate next Wednesday on the issue that Rhona Brankin wanted to ask me about at the end but, curiously, did not. However, this Government is absolutely determined to improve the use and

range of public transport in Scotland. Our programme will fulfil that objective.

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con):

I thank the cabinet secretary for advance sight of his statement and I welcome its contents.

The climate change bill in Scotland will have to be different from the bill in the south; Conservatives accept the need for a separate Scottish bill. However, I am concerned when I hear the cabinet secretary talk about the targets that the Scottish bill will contain. Although I fully accept that Scotland operates from different baselines and has different levels of potential to achieve results, it is essential that Scotland's businesses and local authorities are not placed under a disproportionate burden. Will the cabinet secretary be flexible in setting targets to ensure that Scotland's businesses and local authorities are not put under a disproportionate burden simply in an effort to make Scotland stand out as the world leader in dealing with the problems? We need a level playing field.

Where Scotland's potential to achieve results is greater than that of the rest of the UK, will the cabinet secretary undertake to work within a UK-wide structure to ensure that compensatory fiscal mechanisms are put in place? If Scotland outperforms the rest of the UK, it must not do so simply to make a rod for its own back.

Will the cabinet secretary accept that my questions, and others that will be asked during this question-and-answer session, clearly highlight the point that, although it will be necessary for Scotland to have a separate bill, there will be more need with this bill than with virtually any other piece of legislation to ensure that Scotland's legislation dovetails neatly with UK legislation?

John Swinney: On setting flexible targets for businesses and local authorities, I refer Mr Johnstone to my answer to Rhona Brankin. It is important that every element of our society plays a part in the process that the Government is initiating. Of course the burden should not be disproportionate, but everybody must play their part in assisting the Government to achieve its objectives.

I will highlight one example of a measure that the business community is taking: the proposal that Scottish Power and Iberdrola are advancing at Longannet, which will have an enormous impact on the reduction of carbon emissions in Scotland if it proves to be successful. Business can make an enormous contribution to achieving the agenda in a fashion that also contributes to the Government's wider economic objectives.

Mr Johnstone's second question was whether, if Scotland outperforms the rest of the United Kingdom, it should attract compensatory fiscal

measures. If he will forgive me for saying so, that sounds like an argument for the Scottish Parliament's being given greater fiscal responsibility. He knows that I am keen on that idea, but it is obviously a reserved issue, although I would be very happy to entertain discussions with the United Kingdom ministers on that point if we can construct them.

I made it clear in the statement that we cannot isolate ourselves from climate change: it is a global issue that affects all our societies and communities, so it is important that we not only play a part in the arrangements that obtain within the United Kingdom, but co-operate with other European Union member states in achieving wider objectives on reductions in carbon emissions.

Tavish Scott (Shetland) (LD): I, too, thank Mr Swinney for an advance copy of his statement. Does he accept that two of the most important reports that have been produced on climate change were the Stern report and the report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change? Has his Government's initial thinking on climate change been influenced by those reports—in particular, by the economic analysis in the Stern report?

As a member who represents an agricultural constituency—as I do—John Swinney will be aware that the NFU Scotland has launched a campaign entitled “What's on your plate?”. This is the first day of the Royal Highland show at Ingliston. Is Mr Swinney minister aware that—according to the food campaign group Sustain: The alliance for better food & farming—choosing seasonal products and purchasing them locally could reduce to 376 miles the total distance that a traditional meal travels from farm to fork? That is 66 times fewer food miles than supermarket food, whose ingredients could have travelled more than 24,000 miles cumulatively. Does Mr Swinney agree that tackling that problem would be an important element to the climate change bill and strategy? Will he say how he plans to tackle it through his department or that of his colleague, the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment? What specific measures will he take on public procurement—not only on food but in other areas of procurement—that will assist in reducing emissions?

Mr Swinney made a point about ensuring that he works with the UK Government and wider European interests. Will he undertake to ensure that aviation is included in the European carbon emissions trading scheme? That must be an essential component of future work on climate change.

Will the minister clarify his point about targets for the average annual reductions being based on a five-year period? Does it mean that Parliament would not see progress on reductions until the

next parliamentary session? Will he undertake to consider whether it should be a four-year period so that a Government of whatever persuasion could be held to account within the parliamentary session for which it is responsible?

John Swinney: Yes—the Government's thinking has been influenced by the Stern report and the IPCC report to which Mr Scott referred.

Tavish Scott made an unanswerable point on food miles. There are many excellent ventures throughout the country—I see them in my constituency and I know that they must exist in his—in which local food producers go to tremendous lengths to ensure that quality food is available.

Local food is the subject of tonight's members' business debate, on a motion in Jim Hume's name. I wish him well for what I am sure will be an interesting discussion on that subject. It is also a timely debate, given that the Royal Highland show is taking place and given the excellent produce that is available there.

The Government is carefully considering public procurement. We are all amazed at the difficulties that have been encountered in trying to align public procurement with the sensible point that Mr Scott made on food miles. That is one example. The Government will endeavour to take specific steps to assist the process. We are supportive of the inclusion of aviation in the European Union carbon emissions trading regime, and we have already communicated that view to the United Kingdom Government.

I want to be clear with Parliament in respect of targets. We will report to Parliament annually; it is on that basis that we will monitor the five-year trend period of emissions reductions. Those issues are not a matter for me to dictate; rather, they are for Parliament, in determining its own procedures and how it wishes to hold ministers to account. The Government's view is that there must be a robust process of parliamentary scrutiny of ministers on how they are performing against the targets. Ministers must be held accountable against the targets, and the Government will support Parliament in how decisions are made.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I thank the minister for the advance copy of the statement although, as he will be aware, it will spark disappointment in some quarters, partly in relation to the lack of a commitment to annual targets. As the previous questioner made clear, it is never acceptable for only the next Government to be made accountable for the success or failure of today's policies. I reassure Rhona Brankin that “macho breast beating” is simply not my style.

There is also some disappointment regarding the timescale. In other areas, ministers have

committed to early action to reduce emissions each year. Will the cabinet secretary commit to make good on that commitment, even if it has to be done before any legislation is in force? Will he commit to ensuring that his Government reports this year, next year and every year—even before the legislation is passed—so that we can see what progress is being made by virtue of the carbon emissions policies that the minister is pursuing today and tomorrow?

Will the minister restate the explicit endorsement, which I was pleased to note the First Minister made, of contraction and convergence as the model from which targets must be derived? It is the only game in town. Will the consultation be open to the case for an explicit commitment to contraction and convergence in the forthcoming bill?

John Swinney: I explained in my response to Mr Tavish Scott about the strategic target of 80 per cent being converted into annual targets. We will report annually and we will consider the trend over the five-year period. We obviously have to start somewhere, and it will be for the Administration to contribute to tackling carbon emissions from now on. We have an obligation to tackle the problems. It is not a statutory obligation—it is a moral obligation, so we have to get on and take the appropriate steps. As I said in my statement, we will take whatever steps we can to make progress.

On the timetable to produce legislation, we are taking early action in the sense that I am here today making this statement on behalf of the Cabinet. These issues have been agreed by Cabinet and we are taking the process forward. I have a draft timetable, which takes into account some of the statutory processes that the Government must go through at the various stages. I am advised that we require to develop a strategic environmental assessment before we can even introduce the bill—it is estimated that it will take up to six months to do that. There is no lack of willingness. I assure Parliament that I would love to introduce the bill tomorrow, but before we can, we have statutory requirements to carry out a strategic environmental assessment, a regulatory impact assessment and a variety of other things. I hope that members do not think that, in following existing provisions and the timetable that I have mentioned, the Government is doing anything other than taking the swiftest action it can take. After all, here we are before the summer recess, setting out to Parliament our intention to legislate.

The consultation will of course be open to contraction and convergence and other questions—the Government will carefully examine the evidence. I hope that the Transport,

Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee, of which Patrick Harvie is convener, will decide to be active in the consultation and assessment that the Government is sparking today.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Before I call Roseanna Cunningham, I should say that a considerable number of back benchers would like to be called and I have a little leeway for spokespersons. Accordingly, from now on, I would like us to have questions.

Roseanna Cunningham (Perth) (SNP): The cabinet secretary referred to flood management. Will he publish the public consultation on the definition of sustainable flood management, which, I believe, is still awaited? Does he agree that the problems that are already being experienced in many parts of Scotland, including my constituency, are a manifestation of climate change? Does he also agree that there is a need to move away from short-term, reactive defensive measures, such as the controversial Milnathort scheme, and toward longer-term, more sustainable measures? If so, does he agree that the grant funding arrangements that favour the former rather than the latter must be revisited in any future developments?

John Swinney: I assure Roseanna Cunningham that Mr Russell will attend to the publication of the consultation on sustainable flood management. We expect to publish it in due course.

On the general approach to flood alleviation, some important work has been undertaken by organisations such as WWF Scotland—some of which was taken forward by the previous Administration—that demonstrates that some of the longer-term, softer measures to which Roseanna Cunningham referred can make a great impact on flood alleviation. The Government is sympathetic to that view, but we have to legislate on flooding because the Flood Prevention (Scotland) Act 1961, which governs these issues, is an inhibitor to our taking the route that Roseanna Cunningham would like us to take. That will be the focus of part of the legislative process.

Sarah Boyack (Edinburgh Central) (Lab): I draw members' attention to my entry in the register of members' interests.

I welcome the overall thrust of the minister's statement. I recognise much of it from my party's manifesto, so I can see that he is taking a cross-party approach. I particularly welcome his commitment to introduce flooding legislation, which is urgent, and his offer to listen to ideas to help the Executive meet its carbon emissions reduction targets. Is the cabinet secretary aware that housing accounts for 17.8 million tonnes of carbon emissions a year and that 80 per cent of

the housing that will be standing in 2050 has already been built? Will he, therefore, agree to support legislation to provide fiscal incentives, which are entirely within his legislative competence, for householders and small businesses to improve the energy efficiency of their buildings and to incorporate microgeneration technologies? The Energy Saving Trust highlights the fact that we could make significant reductions in our carbon emissions in that way and that, if we need to move quickly in relation to deep carbon emissions, that is a good place to start.

John Swinney: I thank Sarah Boyack for her question and put on record my acknowledgment of the amount of work she has done on this issue, over many years and in many different capacities.

Sarah Boyack makes an utterly compelling argument, particularly in relation to energy efficiency but also in relation to microgeneration. The scale of untapped potential to reduce carbon emissions by energy-efficiency measures is enormous. That is one of the areas in which we could make urgent and early progress by motivating householders to improve their properties. From visiting various energy-efficiency fairs around the country, I know that a lot of good work is being done by organisations such as the Energy Saving Trust and SCARF, which provides advice to householders. Awareness raising will be a priority for the Government.

Sarah Boyack is right: the existing housing stock is an issue. We will introduce new housing standards to coincide with the ambitions and objectives of the legislation, to ensure that we tackle the challenges cohesively.

Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): Does the minister support Richard Lochhead's position on wind farms, which is that all future industrial-scale projects should be based offshore, or the First Minister's view, which is that there should be a cap on future onshore wind farm development? Can he explain how either of those approaches to wind farms helps in the battle against climate change?

John Swinney: The Government is supportive of a variety of forms of renewable energy. We have supported a number of onshore wind farms, and we supported the work that was done predominantly by the former Deputy First Minister on wave generation. It was welcome. I have been an advocate—possibly even a bore—on the subject of wood-fuel heating systems. We will take forward a variety of measures as part of a balanced renewables strategy.

Mike Rumbles: Onshore wind farms?

John Swinney: The Government has politically supported a number of onshore wind farms. On individual applications, the Government will

exercise its responsibilities under planning legislation, as members would expect.

Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con): I particularly welcome the Government's indication that it is willing to work constructively across the UK to tackle climate change, and I look forward to seeing it work with a Conservative Government after the next Westminster election.

I have one specific concern about the loss of energy because of our building stock in Scotland. Following on from Sarah Boyack's question, do I understand correctly that the Government has plans to incorporate requirements for energy efficiency into building regulations? If so, how will it ensure they are enforced? Will the cabinet secretary commit, as the Minister for Environment did in response to a recent question from me, to consider our eco-bonus scheme to give financial help to householders who wish to install modern energy-saving and energy-creating technologies such as wind turbines and solar panels?

John Swinney: The building standards that I referred to in my answer to Sarah Boyack will incorporate measures to ensure that newly constructed properties achieve higher standards. Nanette Milne asked how we will ensure compliance. They will be building standards with which any developer must comply, and local authorities must judge that under the statutory process.

Nanette Milne's second question was about improving energy efficiency in existing properties and the Conservatives' eco-bonus scheme. We are willing to consider new ideas, although we have not looked at the eco-bonus scheme so far. There is an awful lot that individual householders can do, at not particularly significant capital cost, to improve matters. My experience is that the capital payback through householders' bills is often quick because of the amount of energy that can be saved. Several excellent schemes are already in place; they are promoted by organisations such as SCARF and involve the power companies. The Government will seek ways to ensure greater awareness and uptake of such measures.

Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): In the context of the proposed Scottish climate change bill and a framework within which Scottish industry can invest with certainty in world-beating low-carbon technologies, and to reach the ambitious targets that are being proposed in the bill, will the cabinet secretary seek more levers of power from Westminster if they are needed to achieve the commercial clean energy production and distribution that is currently inhibited by rules from the Department of Trade and Industry and the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets?

John Swinney: The Government is obviously keen for the Parliament to acquire more powers to be more influential in a variety of policy areas, and climate change would be one good example. We are optimistic that we can have constructive discussions with the UK Government on a number of issues to ensure that we can properly deploy power and responsibility in the Parliament in an effective fashion that supports the legislative priorities that I have set out today.

Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab): The science on climate change suggests strongly that long-term targets may be entirely irrelevant unless we take immediate action. The minister spoke about the early action that he intends to take, which is really about the process of getting the bill in place. Will he comment on how the climate change objectives will inform his choices as a finance minister during the next three-year spending review period? How will the objectives be fitted in with outcome targets? How will we identify not just individual good ideas, such as those on microgeneration and energy efficiency to which Sarah Boyack referred, but initiatives across the spectrum of departments? How can we make the process of tackling climate change central to departmental objectives?

John Swinney: I have set out some early measures that can be taken, such as energy efficiency in the home and larger schemes such as that at Longannet power station and the Peterhead carbon capture project, which is dear to the heart of the First Minister. A number of issues can be taken forward, and the Government will make early progress on specific action. I emphasise that we are not just putting the issue away for a couple of years until we get the legislation sorted out—there will be early action to tackle it.

Des McNulty asked how our objectives fit with the budget priorities. The Government has five strategic objectives that have been set out in various parliamentary debates, the last of which will be held next Thursday, on creating a healthier Scotland. Those objectives will guide the Government in the formulation of its budget. We will aim to ensure an effective approach to the definition of cross-cutting expenditure on those major themes. That is an issue that perhaps absorbed too much of Mr McNulty's time during his long service on the Finance Committee, but it is one that the Government has to tackle, and the spending review gives us the opportunity to do it. I look forward to discussing that further with Parliament next week.

Stefan Tymkewycz (Lothians) (SNP): I welcome the emissions reduction targets set by the cabinet secretary and the Government's commitment to tackle climate change. Does he

agree that long-term investment in the use of zero-emission, hydrogen-fuelled buses has the potential to reduce carbon emissions and produce an eco-friendly, flexible and sustainable means of tackling urban transport issues throughout the country? Does he further agree that hydrogen-fuelled buses would be more convenient for passengers as they would cover a larger network of routes than would some alternative systems being considered here in Edinburgh?

John Swinney: Mr Tymkewycz tempts me on to ground that I suspect I will spend most of the next week on, and makes a substantial point about hydrogen-fuelled buses. There is a compelling set of arguments in their favour. Some are being operated already. The Peterhead plant has the potential to support that area of technology, which is one to which the Government would give sympathetic consideration.

Peter Peacock (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): Like others, I very much welcome the spirit of what John Swinney has said and the progress indicated by the forthcoming bill. How the world community tackles climate change is undoubtedly one of the biggest questions that it must address. Mr Swinney talked about mechanisms that might be used to assist the delivery of change. Will he consider, as part of the bill, requiring local authorities, and every other public body in Scotland, to set up a climate change committee—a carbon reduction committee if you like—to plan and initiate action in their organisations, and to monitor progress over time? In the short term, before legislation might require it, will he encourage local authorities and other public bodies to establish such mechanisms in their organisations?

John Swinney: I reinforce a point that I made this morning in response to Mr Gordon in the debate on the council tax. This Government will be less prescriptive to local authorities about how they should go about their business. Nevertheless, all public authorities have an important role to play in realising the ambitions the Government has set out. I encourage local authorities and other public authorities to do everything in their power to support the Government's objectives in respect of climate change. The statement was about statutory, mandatory targets, but the absence of a mandatory target now does not mean that we should not be taking action. The previous Government took action without statutory targets, we will take action without statutory targets, and I encourage others to do so too.

Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind): Does the minister agree that co-operation with the United Kingdom Government on measures to tackle climate change is almost a template for the way in which a southern Parliament would co-operate

sensibly with any Government in London on obviously pan-national matters? If he agrees with that proposition, does he also agree that it would be sensible to include the Republic of Ireland? It would be daft to have carbon emissions trading with Belfast but not with Dublin.

Will the cabinet secretary incorporate energy efficiency standards in public buildings? If so, I presume he will start with the directive that should have been in effect for the Parliament building from 6 January last year.

John Swinney: I have already been tempted on to dangerous territory this afternoon but, my goodness, the territory in the latter part of Margo MacDonald's question is perilous. If she will forgive me, I will leave the energy management of the Parliament building to the wise members of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, who are responsible.

I said in my statement that we have a positive dialogue with the UK Government on the issues that the bill will cover. As I said to Mr Johnstone, it is important that we also have constructive discussions on a wider platform, with the Government of Ireland and other European Union partners.

James Kelly (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab): I note the cabinet secretary's commitment to take immediate action to combat climate change, before the bill is published. The SNP manifesto contained a specific commitment in that regard. It stated that, in the first budget, plans would be announced to quadruple financial support for family and community microgeneration schemes. Is the cabinet secretary still committed to that proposal? If so, from which part of the budget will money be removed to fund the scheme?

John Swinney: As Mr Kelly knows, ministers will consider the Government's forthcoming budget during the summer, as part of wide consultation on our priorities. Of course the proposals in our manifesto will be uppermost in our minds—so that they can be incorporated into the decisions that the Government makes on the budget.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That ends questions to the cabinet secretary. I allowed a little extra time so that I could get everyone in. Timing therefore needs to be tight in the next debate.

Housing

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): The next item of business is a subject debate on housing.

15:42

The Minister for Communities and Sport (Stewart Maxwell): I begin by welcoming the Deputy First Minister, who rushed back from London today to attend this debate on housing. Despite what Johann Lamont said earlier, the Government, the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing and I regard housing as a top priority.

Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): The minister says that housing is a priority, but how does he intend to build consensus in the chamber when he deliberately and wilfully ensured that we would not have access to a document that the journalists knew about?

Stewart Maxwell: I am afraid that the member's information is incorrect. I do not know what her view is based on. I presume that the document she is talking about is the research paper on housing supply, copies of which have been available at the back of the chamber since half past 2. The paper was also sent to business managers at half past 2. Nobody else saw it before that time.

The prosperity of our nation rests on having a good supply of houses—whether for owner occupation, social renting or private sector renting—where people want to live and on terms that they can afford. A healthy housing supply forms the bedrock of fairer, stronger and safer communities.

The new Scottish Government is acutely aware of the difficulties that many people face in achieving their basic housing aspirations. The challenges that lie ahead are immense, but the Government intends to tackle them.

First, the sobering reality is that simply not enough new houses are being built. There are more than 8,500 homeless households in temporary accommodation and there are unacceptably long waiting lists for affordable rented housing throughout Scotland. That is set against a backdrop of property prices that continue to rise at an alarming rate, which makes the problem worse. The consequences are serious not only for individuals and families but for the Scottish economy as a whole. High rates of house price inflation limit labour mobility and reduce our economy's competitiveness.

Secondly, the present arrangements for subsidising social housing are unsustainable. If we do not reform them, it will be impossible to satisfy

the projected demand for social housing in future years.

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): Will the reforms address one of the problems in the Borders, which was recognised by one of the minister's predecessors as an area where the housing market is under particular pressure, so that the Scottish Borders Housing Association can retain receipts from right-to-buy purchases?

Stewart Maxwell: If the member waits, he will hear what I have to say during this debate, as well as the further discussions that will take place throughout the summer and the year to come.

Satisfying the demand for social housing will require an astronomical injection of funding from the public purse—an increase on current spending levels of £750 million over the next three years.

In 2002, the average subsidy paid for each house built for social renting was £52,000. This year, it is £79,000, which is an increase of 35 per cent above inflation. A lot more money has been spent, but it is not necessarily the case that a lot more houses have been delivered. We need to find ways to get much better value for the large sums of money we spend on new housing, and ways to ensure that tenants get a fair deal for the rent they pay.

This Government has inherited from the previous Administration real problems in housing that have built up over many years. It is time to act and I want to work with those in the social housing sector to identify solutions that we can afford, that will work, and that will focus on delivering what tenants want. More than that, I want to enable the sector to adapt to the challenges that it faces in a rapidly changing society.

Working with stakeholders in the coming weeks, we will develop proposals to get better value and improve the deal for existing tenants and those in housing need. We will consult on those ideas in the autumn and I hope that the consultation will enable people throughout Scotland to join the debate and offer their own ideas about how the sector should adapt and contribute to meeting our strategic objectives for Scotland. This is not just about bricks and mortar, but about making informed decisions that chime with our wider goals to create a Scotland that is wealthier and fairer, healthier, safer and stronger, smarter and greener.

One of the burning questions in my mind is whether we are getting value for the huge sums of taxpayers' money that are being ploughed into housing provision. The increasing cost of subsidy per house that I mentioned a moment ago suggests that we are not. We must get more housing for the public money we spend.

I began by stating my view that, overall, housing supply in Scotland is insufficient. I have therefore published today the Government's initial analysis of the Scottish housing market, which highlights the recent unprecedented growth in Scottish house prices. Copies have been at the back of the chamber since the report was published at 2.30.

Higher house prices act as a serious barrier to the aspirations of people who are trying to get on the housing ladder for the first time and those who are trying to move up. The study finds that such problems are especially acute in parts of rural Scotland and in Edinburgh and the Lothians, where up to 30 per cent of working households are unable to afford the cheapest accommodation. It is particularly concerning that the study shows that higher demand for housing is not being matched by an adequate supply response. Average house prices rose by 72 per cent between 2002 and 2006, but only 2 per cent more homes were built in 2006 than in 2002. Not enough homes are being built to meet our needs. Increasing housing supply overall in a way that creates vibrant, mixed and environmentally sustainable communities will be a major challenge for the Government and for local authorities, housing providers and the construction industry.

Johann Lamont: I am interested to know how the minister will build those houses. He will be aware that some of his back benchers believe that the housing association movement is privatisation. On the other hand, in a debate in February 2007, Roseanna Cunningham said:

"I do not care who builds affordable houses as long as they are built. They must be built both for rent and for sale".—[*Official Report*, 22 February 2007; c 32465.]

Can I assume that the minister is not rejecting the use of transfer to housing associations, or indeed the use of the private sector, which I understand the cabinet secretary ruled out in relation to the health service this morning?

Stewart Maxwell: Unfortunately, and as usual, Ms Lamont misinterprets our policies and where we stand on the issue. We have never ruled out small-scale stock transfer, and we do not view housing associations as privatisation.

Because of the entrenched and long-standing problems with housing supply, I have decided to establish and lead a housing supply task force to tackle obstacles such as land supply and the planning issues that have been hampering the delivery of more housing. It will challenge the way in which things are done so that the homes we need can be built where we need them. The task force will have a wide membership drawn from members of local authorities, house builders, the housing association movement and housing interest groups—all people who are in a position to

bring about change. It will work to a clear remit and drive forward a focused plan of action.

I am pleased to say that we intend to work to create a Scottish housing support fund to provide additional help for the many people who struggle to afford a first home of their own.

We have begun to explore options with the private sector, which we know is keen to invest more in housing and regeneration in Scotland. We need to find new ways to make that happen. We are committed to supporting first-time buyers through the new fund, but we are also looking at providing direct grants, which will be considered in the context of the wider spending review.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): How does the Government respond to the suggestion that the housing support fund for first-time buyers and other policies such as the removal of any element of property tax are inflationary measures that will make life worse for people who aspire to be first-time buyers?

Stewart Maxwell: I do not necessarily accept what the member says but, as I said, we will consider all such issues as part of the wider review.

It has been acknowledged that the right to buy has been a popular route into home ownership for thousands of people over the years. We do not want to remove the rights of existing tenants, but as we set out in our manifesto, we will explore ways of achieving greater local flexibility in the operation of the scheme. That is only right when many areas face particular supply pressures.

I turn briefly to Communities Scotland. We want to consider how we can deliver our housing and regeneration commitments through a simpler public sector landscape that supports local delivery. I confirm that we will arrive at firm conclusions over the next few months. As a result, there will be no major changes in the meantime. I also confirm to Parliament that I have written to staff today to explain my thinking about the agency.

It is clear that change is needed if we are to respond to the housing needs of 21st century Scotland. This Parliament has shown its ability to work together to tackle important housing issues, not least the ambitious goal to provide homes for all unintentionally homeless people by 2012.

The adequacy of our housing supply and the sustainability of the way we fund our social housing are issues that are bigger than party politics. It is in all our interests, indeed it is our duty, to work together in a spirit of co-operation to end long waiting lists and bad housing. The people of Scotland deserve no less.

15:52

Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): I welcome Stewart Maxwell to his position. However, I am genuinely disappointed that this first opportunity to debate housing should be so abridged. That, of course, is a matter for the Executive, which decided to include a statement and another debate as part of business earlier on. I am delighted by the presence of the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing and trust that she will respond to my point of order and ensure that, in the Cabinet, she is a strong advocate for housing.

Although I will speak about Stewart Maxwell's statement when the Presiding Officer responds, I say to Stewart Maxwell that he ought to recognise that government by wizard wheezes and sleight of hand is demeaning to his office and insulting to this chamber. It will not do. I am not clear why the availability of what now appears to be an economic discussion paper was not indicated before, but I will pursue the matter later.

What consensus can achieve in Parliament when people work together, particularly in housing policy, has been a significant mark of the Scottish Parliament over the past eight years: the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 was passed by 114 votes to one; the Homelessness etc (Scotland) Act 2003 was passed by 98 votes to none; and the Housing (Scotland) Act 2006 was passed by 116 votes to one. The SNP will have to learn to do more than just spell the word "consensus" to achieve it in future.

There was clear agreement across the chamber on those policies. It was the significant work to build and achieve that consensus that was the new politics of Scotland—it built on the work of the housing improvement and homelessness task forces, it was shaped by the concerns and interests of MSPs in this Parliament and the communities that they represent, and critically, it understood that if we are going to build communities and good housing, we work with the communities to understand what the problems are and how they have to be solved. That approach is in stark contrast to the current one, which is represented by the SNP flagship policy of pledging £2,000 to first-time buyers. Remarkably, Mr Maxwell both departs from his policy and holds on to it at the same time.

Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP): Why was second-stage transfer never taken forward when the member was in charge of housing? Will she confirm that she was told by the Glasgow Housing Association in 2004 that there was not enough money for second-stage transfer to go ahead?

Johann Lamont: First, the previous Executive was committed to second-stage transfer whereas

the member's party opposed making a £700 million investment in Glasgow's housing. Therefore, we will take no lectures from those who had no confidence in the people of Glasgow.

The fact is that the first-time buyers policy has a recklessness cost of perhaps £50 million or £70 million and an opportunity cost.

Bob Doris (Glasgow) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Johann Lamont: Our minister says that the SNP does not know whether it will definitely implement that policy—that will depend on the comprehensive spending review.

Bob Doris: Will the member give way?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Johann Lamont is not giving way.

Johann Lamont: The comprehensive spending review is not a process that happens to ministers. I want to know what the Minister for Communities and Sport will argue in the comprehensive spending review. Will he argue for his flagship policy, which everyone who works in housing has rubbished and which will not deliver the change that they want? Will he hold on to that policy or will he accept the inevitable fact that it will not work?

It is essential to address some of the significant tensions in housing. One issue with which we can all wrestle is how much affordable housing will be social rented housing and how much will be for low-cost ownership. What will we do for people whose stock has been transferred? What support will the Administration give people who voted for stock transfer? What will the SNP do for people who voted no because members of that party scaremongered them into voting against their own interest?

Nothing has been said about a capital programme in housing.

Bob Doris: I thank the member for giving way. I remember well the debate on housing stock transfer in Glasgow. Some members feared that the Glasgow Housing Association might become an entrenched provider of social housing and would be like a large company.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You are supposed to be asking a question, Mr Doris.

Bob Doris: I will ask the question. Does the member agree that the best way in which to build confidence in social rented housing is for the Opposition to work with the Government to achieve second-stage transfer in Glasgow?

Johann Lamont: I know that Bob Doris has been a member only a short while, but I tell him that trying to rewrite history is a bad idea. Opponents of stock transfer said that it

represented privatisation. The SNP actively encouraged people to vote against their own interests and against investment, but now it has nothing to say to the people of Renfrewshire, the Highlands or Edinburgh.

Bob Doris: Will the member let me back in?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Sit down, Mr Doris.

Bob Doris: I have been referred to.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Sit down.

Johann Lamont: I want people to think about some of the hard issues. When the minister invests money, will he address need in rural areas or in economic hot spots or will he recognise the challenge in regeneration areas, where the pressure on housing costs does not exist, but a huge challenge exists nevertheless? Will the minister focus on the challenge of homelessness? We are proud of the priority that we gave to tackling homelessness, but the minister's dismal response—

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon): I just want the member to answer a simple question. If, now that she is in opposition, she is full of good ideas about how to face up to the challenge, why did she implement none of them when she had the chance in government?

Johann Lamont: When ministers finally meet the housing organisations that they conceded this afternoon they would meet, they might want to reflect on the fact that those organisations supported everything that the previous Executive did on housing, saw that as the direction of travel and are calling on the current Administration to follow that.

There has been consensus. Members cannot rubbish what they first supported. They cannot say, "This is a new broom," without producing proposals to address the situation.

On homelessness, we must think about the challenge of mixed communities. We need to understand how we spend on homeless people. We need to consider not just bricks and mortar, but the serious question of what makes people homeless.

I do not think that the minister said anything about the right to buy.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You should finish now, Ms Lamont.

Johann Lamont: We need to talk about pressured area status and so on.

The debate is important. We have had a bad start to it but, when there is productive and

constructive work to do, Labour stands ready. We look forward to the challenge of developing housing strategy for the next period.

15:58

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):

I share Johann Lamont's concerns about "Scottish Housing Market Review—Evidence and Analysis 2007", which is an excellent discussion paper. I am just sorry that I did not have the time to absorb it in order to discuss it, so that I could contribute in a more informed way to the debate.

Stewart Maxwell: Will the member take an intervention?

Mary Scanlon: Yes, but I have only four minutes for my speech.

Stewart Maxwell: The document is a research paper on the background statistics on housing supply in Scotland. The debate is not about that document.

Mary Scanlon: The document is a research paper on the background to housing supply and demand, which informs the debate enormously. I know that because, after I had written my speech, I found that the statistics and analysis in the document were far better than what was in my speech. If the Administration expects to co-operate with other parties, I suggest that it start treating us with some respect.

While I am talking to you, Mr Maxwell, I say that I did not think that your rhetoric this morning—categorising anyone who was opposed to your amendments as anti-Scottish—was helpful. I hope that the cabinet secretary will bring you into line because we are here to work positively.

Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. With the greatest respect, I ask that members address one another through the chair.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): Thank you for bringing that to the attention of the chamber, Ms MacDonald. The Presiding Officers are bearing that in mind.

Mary Scanlon: I welcome the Scottish housing support fund. I hope that we can enter into more constructive discussions about it in the future, because it sounds not unlike the Conservative version of the affordable housing trust—but that is for another day. Like others, I am delighted to have a debate on housing, especially affordable housing. As I am already halfway through my time, I will be brief.

I ask the minister to ensure that, when we discuss housing, we also discuss planning. I say that as a result of personal experience. Around Inverness, not hundreds but thousands of new

houses are being built. That is an example of building houses but not building communities. A new school that is opening not far from my house is already almost full, although there are still hundreds of houses to be built. When houses are being built, councils should plan for communities, not simply for isolated housing estates.

I was just saying to my colleague Jackson Carlaw that I am not sure where the SNP stands on housing stock transfer. I thought that it was against it; now, I think that it may be in favour of it. We are certainly in favour of it. I hope that council tenants, especially in the Highland region, will get an opportunity to vote again, whether on a small scale or a larger scale. There is no doubt that, with the housing debt in the Highland region, the council is unable to invest in the properties.

I understand that the £2,000 for first-time buyers will be given to all, from the needy, who are struggling to get a foot on the housing ladder, to those who are well off. I share the view that has been expressed that the grant could be inflationary and could benefit both the landowners and the sellers, while making house prices even higher for first-time buyers.

I ask the minister to look again at the single-seller survey.

Finally, I ask the minister to reconsider the national registration scheme for private landlords, which was put into the wrong bill. The scheme should have been included in housing management legislation, not antisocial behaviour legislation.

16:03

Jim Tolson (Dunfermline West) (LD): For many years, I have been concerned, and at times shocked, by the realities that are faced by many people throughout Scotland, from empty flats that have been stripped of their fixtures and fittings—including central heating systems—to young single mothers with two or three children, some of whom have chronic health problems, seeking new housing. Yet, in the vast majority of cases, there is no prospect of the residents being willing or able to buy their own council homes; therefore, affordable housing to rent is the only option that will enable them to have a decent standard of living.

Despite massive private housing developments in my constituency, as well as in others, the greatest need is in the affordable housing sector. Over the past 20-plus years, Thatcher's right to buy and the break-up of families have been just two of the problems that have contributed significantly to massive pressures on our housing market. With more demand comes the need to cater for all sectors in the housing market.

Affordable housing is broadly defined as housing of reasonable quality that is affordable to people on modest incomes. In some places, the market can provide some or all of the affordable housing that is needed; in other places, it is necessary to make housing available at a cost below market value to meet housing needs.

However, no matter the affordability of housing, it must be available in sufficient numbers and size and in the right locations to meet modern needs. Nothing can be worse than not having a home at all. That is why the previous Government's groundbreaking legislation to end homelessness by 2012 is so important. The programme to tackle homelessness has received international acclaim, and Scotland has rightly been recognised as having the best legislation on homelessness in western Europe.

The Homelessness etc (Scotland) Act 2003 ended a bias in the law that left single people or childless couples sidelined in temporary accommodation. Housing organisations such as Shelter and the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations say that 30,000 more homes need to be built by 2011 if we are to handle the pressures that the 2012 target will put on the social housing market. I certainly hope that the Government will not let that extremely tough challenge slip by; there was no mention of it in the SNP's manifesto.

Finally, I turn to the often thorny issue of housing stock transfer. No local authority in Scotland could have claimed that all its stock met the Scottish housing quality standard. Indeed, a vast amount of the housing stock of some local authorities was in very poor condition. I do not blame particular local authorities for that but, for the authorities concerned, stock transfer offered a lifeline, in that it enabled them to wipe out their massive housing debt and to get the stock improved or replaced. Other local authorities, including mine in Fife, made a good case to Communities Scotland on how they could retain their housing stock and invest in improving it to meet the 2015 SHQS.

One size certainly did not fit all but, fortunately, the previous Government gave local authorities and communities a say in the future of their housing stock. Yet again, the SNP opposed stock transfer. I hope that the Government will admit that thousands of people in Scotland are now benefiting from new or refurbished homes because their local authority chose to transfer its stock.

16:06

Tricia Marwick (Central Fife) (SNP): I am delighted to welcome my friend Stewart Maxwell to his first debate as the minister responsible for housing. He has a difficult brief because he has

inherited a mess from Labour and the Liberal Democrats, who neglected housing in Scotland for the eight years for which they were in government. I acknowledge fully that the previous Administration put through the Parliament a raft of homelessness and housing legislation that had the SNP's support but, by and large, that legislation was underfunded and those chickens are coming home to roost.

Let us examine the state of housing in Scotland. We face record waiting lists, record levels of homelessness and the lowest number of first-time buyers on record. We did not need the research document that has been issued today to tell us that; the trends have been apparent for a number of years.

Given the importance of housing, I am delighted that the SNP Government has decided to hold a parliamentary debate on the subject in its first month in office. In the second session of Parliament, the previous Executive, in contrast, did not hold a single debate on housing in 2003. It was not until 4 February 2004 that it held a debate on the subject. In the first parliamentary session, the first such debate was not held until 10 November 1999, when the topic was homelessness rather than housing. The SNP Government should take no lectures from the Labour members who complain about a lack of commitment to housing.

The housing organisations claim that 30,000 houses are needed in Scotland. I have no doubt that they are right, but that is simply recognition of the backlog in house building that the previous Executive allowed to build up. The previous Executive's record is quite shameful. Every year between 1999 and 2004, the Executive built fewer houses than the Tories did in 1995. That is why we have a backlog.

I am delighted that the housing minister will progress the proposal to create a Scottish housing support fund, which was in our manifesto. That will make an enormous difference to first-time buyers. As Mary Scanlon mentioned, it is not dissimilar to the Tories' policy, but it is a great deal better. I invite Mary Scanlon to engage with us.

Patrick Harvie said that our proposal could be inflationary, but I am sure that he attended the meeting of the Communities Committee in session 2 at which the previous Executive's expert, Professor Bramley, said that a properly targeted Scottish housing support fund—which is what the SNP proposes—would not produce inflationary pressures in the housing market. Patrick Harvie should have another look at what Professor Bramley said.

There are many things that the Government must do. I urge the minister to examine, at the

earliest opportunity, the situation of the GHA and to ensure that those housing associations that are in a position to receive houses receive them as quickly as possible. We must not allow the GHA to prevent that, and we look forward enormously to its happening, because the previous Executive failed to deliver for the people of Glasgow.

16:10

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): I am glad that we are debating housing, but I echo Johann Lamont's disappointment at the length of the debate, which has prevented many of my colleagues who wished to participate from doing so. We need to look at that issue in the future.

I represent the Highlands and Islands, where there are a range of housing issues. We have urban problems in Inverness, Thurso, parts of Argyll and some of the smaller towns, where houses were built to cope with incoming workers during the oil boom. That estate needs to be updated and cared for. In more remote areas, we have problems with the availability of land for rented and affordable housing. Throughout the area we have a problem with housing prices, which is most extreme on the west coast and in the Cairngorms national park. Many houses are sold as second homes, and local people cannot afford to compete with people coming from cities, who can outbid them on each occasion.

We need to protect the affordable and social rented housing sector in rural areas. The previous Executive instigated pressured area status, and the current Executive must work with local authorities to ensure that they use that power to protect housing stock, where necessary.

We need to consider solutions from other areas. In the Yorkshire Dales national park and on Guernsey, the housing market is restricted to those who have family ties with, have lived in or require to work in the area. Guernsey has another market for those who want to buy second and holiday homes. It recognises that that brings benefits, but ensures that such buyers do not compete with local people and price essential workers out of the market.

In the Highlands, people need to do several jobs, some of them seasonal, to make a living. Those diverse incomes are not recognised by banks and building societies as a stable basis for a mortgage. If we restricted the markets in such areas, local house prices would reflect the income of those who live and work there, which would mean that there was a level playing field.

The homestake scheme has been particularly successful in giving people on low incomes the opportunity to own their homes. By using shared equity schemes, people can get on to the property

ladder and build up equity in their property. The scheme that operates in Edinburgh and the Lothians, which allows homestake to be used to buy houses on the open market, should be extended to other areas. It would be particularly useful in rural areas, where it is difficult for social landlords and developers to build. I ask the Scottish Executive to commit itself to continuing and extending the scheme.

The cost of land in both rural and urban areas also prohibits house buying and building, which adds to difficulties with the availability of housing stock. We need to consider ways of providing services that are both affordable and sustainable in those areas.

Johann Lamont made the point that the council housing estate in areas such as Highland needs modernisation. The nationalist Executive has a moral duty to provide the funding for that, given that it campaigned against stock transfer, misleading people into believing that it meant privatisation. The Executive has a duty to ensure that money is available for investment in Highland housing stock.

I urge the nationalists to look again at their policy of giving £2,000 grants to first-time buyers. That will lead to an increase of £2,000 in house prices for those who can already afford to buy and will do nothing for those who are in genuine need. The money needs to be more targeted, to allow those who need to buy a first home to do so. It must also be targeted at families who own a small home, have had children and need, but cannot afford to move to, a bigger house. A successful housing policy must be multifaceted and geared to meeting the needs of the whole population. It should not be just a populist gimmick.

16:14

Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I welcome this opportunity to debate housing policy. Like many members who campaigned in the recent election, I found that affordable housing was a key issue that was raised with me time and again. It is a massive subject across Scotland, particularly in my region of the Highlands and Islands and especially in the more remote areas and on the islands.

In Argyll and Bute, which has 27 inhabited islands, the average salary is £17,758, which is a good deal less than the Scottish average of £21,149. It is interesting to work out what an average person who buys an average house at £151,000 is left to live on once the cost of their housing is taken out. After income tax at 22 per cent, that average person would receive £1,143 a month, while their total monthly outgoings for mortgage, council tax and water charges would

amount to £1,157.80. That would leave them minus £15 to pay for everything else. Such a situation is clearly unsustainable, and our proposal for affordable housing trusts would make a difference by helping to shoulder the burden, particularly for first-time buyers.

Since the election, I have continued to receive numerous letters and e-mails from young people in the Highlands and elsewhere who are desperately trying to find a place on the housing ladder. Indeed, I received a typical letter just this week from Mrs Lucy Pond, who lives on Tiree. She and her husband, who are committed to staying on the island and have full employment, have been desperately trying to find permanent accommodation for more than four years. Sadly, their frustration and anger are shared by far too many young couples across Scotland. We must find ways of increasing the amount of affordable rented property, given that the number of households in temporary accommodation has increased by 150 per cent since 1999. That dreadful record was, I am afraid to say, achieved by Labour and the Liberal Democrats.

As other members have pointed out, infrastructure is critical to the provision of affordable housing, and I support the Chartered Institute of Housing in Scotland's call for Scottish Water to engage positively and constructively with Communities Scotland—for as long as it remains—local authority housing departments and registered social landlords to ensure that future water and sewerage investment ties in with strategic housing investment plans. It is crucial to get that kind of joined-up thinking and planning.

Although communities throughout Scotland are in real need of new affordable housing, they are told repeatedly that they cannot get it because of development constraints. That is simply not good enough: development constraints need to be tackled in our villages and small towns as well as in our larger towns and cities. In that respect, the SNP has promised action to remove the barriers that impede investment in water and sewerage.

However, the SNP has also pledged to create a Scottish housing support fund to provide loans to first-time buyers. We do not know whether such a move will provide value for money, and I ask the minister to consider the Scottish Conservatives' suggestion for affordable homes trusts. Indeed, the Council of Mortgage Lenders has been positive about that proposal, which goes further than the Government's proposals. It is vital that the Executive engages with the private sector, which has a key role in helping to tackle the lack of affordable housing.

As it is—regrettably—unrealistic to expect everyone to own their own home, we want to ensure that social housing works better for those

who need it. Transferring housing allocation powers to local government would help in that respect. After all, the present centralised control leads to families being matched with homes that are unsuitable both for their needs and for the community. Local authorities that make a local judgment based on local circumstances have a far greater chance of getting things right than remote politicians who try to micromanage the housing situation.

16:19

John Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP): I congratulate the minister on his appointment to a new—and, in the coming years, no doubt challenging—role.

In my experience, many organisations pay lip service to active participation by communities in areas where public sector housing need is the greatest and, in some cases, the most problematic. I had the privilege of working with tenants and residents groups in Castlemilk after its designation in 1988 by the then Conservative Government at Westminster as one of the new life for urban Scotland partnership areas.

The United Kingdom Government policies of right to buy and large-scale voluntary transfer have produced many changes in the housing market in the past 25 years. Moreover, there was a push in recent times by the two previous Scottish Executive Administrations towards large-scale voluntary stock transfers of public sector housing, which was marketed as community ownership. Some people might say that that was pushing the concept a touch too far.

That was typified by Glasgow City Council's stock transfer in 2001, which led to the creation of the Glasgow Housing Association. It is clearly a great misnomer to call the GHA a "housing association"—that term was used to build on the perception of local housing associations as successful agents for local change. That policy thrust took place not only in an urban context, but in rural areas—for example, the housing stock transfer from Argyll and Bute Council.

The *Social Housing Journal* of May 2007 highlighted the fact that Argyll Community Housing Association received gap funding from the public purse to the extent that the UK Exchequer and Communities Scotland wrote off its housing debt of £48 million. In addition, Communities Scotland provided early action funding of £15 million.

The gap funding in the GHA's finances has been well documented, but it is significant that the stock condition survey—commissioned by the GHA, funded by the public purse and undertaken by Savills—has not, to my knowledge, been made public. The survey is cloaked in secrecy and I urge

the minister and the Scottish Government to make public the survey document, which I believe goes to the heart of the issue of the GHA's financial viability.

That brings me to the issue of corporate governance and the role of Communities Scotland. I note what the minister said about that agency, but I seek assurances about the timetable for implementing the SNP manifesto commitments on Communities Scotland. All too often, there has been a revolving-door situation in that Government agency. A culture exists in which an officer leaves his or her post, joins a consultancy or becomes a consultant to advise housing bodies on, for example, regulation and inspection, then further down the line is re-employed by Communities Scotland. It could be argued that there are conflicts of interests in the roles and remits of that organisation's staff.

On the corporate governance issues that relate particularly to registered social landlords and housing associations, some larger associations have a small shareholding membership. Peter Malpass and Alan Murie, who are well-respected housing professors, used the phrase "self-perpetuating oligarchies" to describe housing association committees.

Homelessness and social inclusion are key issues that the Government must tackle, and a holistic approach to health and housing is crucial. However, only with independence can that agenda be taken forward to make a sustained contribution towards creating a healthier Scotland.

The term "affordability" has entered the language of housing in Scotland in the past few years. However, the issue of what people can afford to pay to meet their housing needs has always been paramount in the context of household budgets.

16:23

Hugh O'Donnell (Central Scotland) (LD): Many of our housing availability problems rest firmly at the Tories' door. They sold off 2.1 million houses that were public accommodation.

I was interested to hear Patricia Marwick quote Glen Bramley in support. Interestingly, I have another quotation of his that is not quite so supportive. Referring to the proposed £2,000 that we have heard the SNP talk about, he said that

"It would help a small number of extra people,"

and that 98 per cent would not be helped. Others have said that the £2,000 grant could potentially be inflationary. In any case, it does not deal with the fundamental issue of public housing stock.

Tricia Marwick: I thank the member for using my Sunday name.

My comments about Glen Bramley related not to the £2,000 grant, but to the shared equity scheme—the Scottish housing support fund—that the SNP proposes.

Hugh O'Donnell: I thank the member for her clarification, but my point holds good. The £2,000 grant will not make much difference. Although it might pull some extra people into ownership, it is not targeted and it is expected to cost between £40 million and £70 million. We could build an extra 1,000 houses for that money—that is what the director of Shelter Scotland said, and who knows more about the urgent need for housing in Scotland than the people at Shelter and the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations? There is general discontent in the field about the SNP's proposals.

I supported the principle of housing stock transfer, as did the Liberal Democrats in general. The main attraction for me was the potential for local community ownership, which would enable people to own houses and have a say in their management. We all know stories about the mismanagement of housing stock by large local authorities, which in many ways created and contributed to the current crisis.

However, I am seriously worried about a trend in housing stock transfer—I leave aside the nonsense about the GHA stock transfer, to which members referred. I am concerned that super housing associations are scooping up small, community-based, local housing associations. In Cumbernauld, which is my home town, the Cumbernauld Housing Partnership is about to be subsumed into the Sanctuary Housing Association. I understand that there is a similar situation in East Kilbride, and there have been other such instances throughout the country. We are transferring stock from democratic, although clearly not competent, organisations to non-democratic organisations whose competence is equally questionable. The minister must make it a priority to address that. We were encouraged to support non-democratic organisations simply to satisfy Treasury rules. In one case, such an organisation controls 56,000 houses. That is not acceptable.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must wind up.

Hugh O'Donnell: Thank you, but I am worried that you might break your microphone.

I seek the minister's assurance that he will include federations of tenants associations in all consultation on the way forward. Thus far, Communities Scotland has failed to do so.

16:28

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab): I will concentrate on the supply of affordable homes, first considering Scotland as a whole, and then concentrating on Edinburgh and Leith.

The previous Administration was planning to build 8,000 affordable homes Scotland-wide this year. The annual total build has increased steadily, and 8,000 is the highest number for many years. The figure was based on analysis done by Professor Glen Bramley for the most recent spending review, which he updated last year for the forthcoming spending review. In his most recent, detailed and complex piece of work, "Local housing need and affordability model for Scotland: Update", Professor Bramley emphasised that need has increased substantially since his previous report, as a result of market changes. That is why the number of new affordable homes built each year must continue to increase. Like Stewart Maxwell, I signed the Shelter-inspired motion that was lodged before the election, which called for 10,000 affordable homes for rent to be built in each of the next three years. Patrick Harvie lodged the same motion this week.

As well as the market changes that Bramley emphasised, I flag up our ambitious 2012 homelessness target, which has been widely admired internationally. We should all be proud of the target. The forthcoming spending review will be critical in the successful delivery of the target. The Government needs to consider capital spend throughout the Executive and must give the utmost priority to our flagship homelessness commitment.

One of the most striking tables in Bramley's authoritative report appears on page 8. It shows the positive net need for new affordable homes in each local authority in Scotland.

The positive net need in Edinburgh is shown to be five times that in any other local authority in Scotland. Despite the budget allocation for affordable homes in Edinburgh being twice what it was three years ago, it is still well below the per capita Scottish average. That historic imbalance has begun to be corrected, but there is a long way to go. According to Professor Bramley, Edinburgh has a shortage of 2,500 affordable lets each year—and that is before we consider new homelessness rights and a projected 11 per cent population increase and 22 per cent household increase over the next 15 years.

This is an urgent social issue. A large number of individuals and families are excluded from the social rented sector and are unable to buy because the average house price in Edinburgh is around eight times the average full-time wage in

Edinburgh. It is also a pressing economic issue. Employers in both the public and private sectors feel the impact of people's inability to access housing. The minister will have noticed that the Edinburgh problem is highlighted in the report issued today.

Some have argued that the problem in Edinburgh is not resources but land. Land is certainly an issue, and more has to be released for housing, both market and subsidised. We also need to find out urgently why the affordable housing contributions in private developments have been slow to come on stream in Edinburgh. However, the key land issue is cost. Land in Edinburgh costs three and a half times the Scottish average and therefore takes up a higher proportion of housing grant than anywhere else in Scotland.

In Edinburgh and elsewhere, the bulk of resources has to go into affordable rented housing. However, we also have to continue the very successful shared equity homestake scheme, which has helped hundreds of first-time buyers and others in Edinburgh, Leith and elsewhere in Scotland. That will be a much more effective way of subsidising first-time buyers than a blanket £2,000 subsidy, which has been condemned by all the well-known housing organisations.

I look forward to the autumn consultation on better value than Stewart Maxwell announced. I hope that a way will be found to spread housing subsidy over a longer period, without going down the private finance initiative route.

Will Stewart Maxwell follow through the logic of the Bramley report and of the report issued today? Will he ensure that, in the distribution of resources for new affordable homes, the particular circumstances of Edinburgh are taken into account?

16:32

Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): As this is my first speech to the Parliament, I want to start by paying tribute to my predecessor Margaret Jamieson. Margaret served her constituents over eight years with great diligence and commitment, and I wish her well for the future.

Although I come here with a sense of delight and honour in being elected to serve Kilmarnock and Loudoun, I also come with great sadness and heartbreak. My brother, Councillor Danny Coffey, died suddenly only a few short weeks after being selected to contest the seat. The honour that I feel in standing here among you all—despite the earlier exchanges—is a tribute to Danny's life and work for our beloved Scotland. Many of my local party colleagues will be forever in his debt.

As a local councillor, I have many years' experience in dealing with housing matters. In my view, many of the housing problems that we face today fall broadly into three main areas: the lack of affordable housing and the consequent huge waiting lists; the requirement for capital programme investment to maintain and improve the remaining stock; and the overall standards of service that people receive, including services in repairs and estate management.

Housing services are at a crossroads. Although investment in capital programmes has been good in my authority area in East Ayrshire, there remain many concerns about the lack of supply and the overall standards of service. Those concerns will have to be addressed.

The challenges faced by my authority are probably no different from the challenges faced by other housing authorities across Scotland. Annual stock losses due to sales are around 350 a year; more than 5,000 applicants are on our waiting list, but we manage to make only an average of 1,200 allocations a year; and the impact of trying to meet homelessness targets through the general needs waiting lists is causing us serious problems. Furthermore, there are problems of dissatisfaction with repairs and in dealing with antisocial behaviour. All those points indicate the scale of our problems.

However, it is not all gloom and doom. I was pleased to hear that the minister has committed to examining the supply issue—at least via the task force—and I also welcome his plans for consultation on the overall future direction for housing. I hope that I will be able to influence his thinking a little and that I might ask him to consider at least a few of the following points over the coming months.

We should certainly plan to build communities, not just houses, as Mary Scanlon mentioned. We should encourage local authorities to promote vigorously their rented housing stock and spell out the advantages of renting as opposed to buying. We should also consider providing incentives for those with long-standing tenancies. Other businesses seem to be innovative in doing that, so why can we not do it in the housing sector? We should be more flexible about offering upgrades that tenants want, rather than giving them what the housing authorities decide that they should have. We have to work constantly on customer satisfaction and on making improvements if people are to stay with the social rented sector. We have to get smarter about working with our partners to deal with those who make life a misery for the residents of many of our housing estates.

I am delighted to support the minister in his address to the Parliament on the future of housing in Scotland. If we make good progress on that, we

will have taken vital steps towards delivering housing services that are fit for 21st century Scotland.

16:36

Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind): I congratulate Willie Coffey on his maiden speech; I think that he will fit in very well here. I agree with Hugh O'Donnell's concluding remarks that tenants should be consulted—they are the one group that we had not heard about.

I was the director of Shelter about 30 years ago. When the Conservatives introduced the right to buy, we warned them that, 25 or 30 years down the road, we would have a housing crisis in Scotland. It gives me no pleasure to say that we were right. The Conservatives, perhaps more than most, have a duty to help the Government put things right.

The right to buy should be suspended in areas such as Edinburgh where it is perfectly obvious that the loss of housing stock cannot be made up in the required time. We should consider that suspension not as a national measure, but a local one, because the situation in other areas is different. However, I speak for Edinburgh and it would be a good idea to suspend the right to buy there for some time. As Malcolm Chisholm said, people cannot afford to live in Edinburgh—the sort of people we need if the city is to remain vibrant and feasible. They are not poor people—they are holding down well-paid jobs—but they cannot afford to buy houses, given that the average house price in Edinburgh is £220,000, which is eight times the average annual salary.

Of the 10,400 new homes built in the city since 2001, only 18 were affordable homes. We need 12,000 affordable homes to be built over 10 years if we are to keep the people I referred to living in the city.

The tenants in Edinburgh, who are the sort of people I am concerned about, used their democratic right to vote against the stock transfer. I will not go into the reasons, but simply acknowledge that they did so as intelligent people who considered what had happened with stock transfer elsewhere and made their decision. The debt should be written off for them, as it was written off for the people in other local authorities who voted for stock transfer. I appreciate that the issue concerns lots of other housing authorities too, but the minister should make representations to the Chancellor of the Exchequer—whoever that is after next week—that we should be fair and even-handed in our treatment of tenants.

I will finish with another plea for capital city funding. Edinburgh gets much less money from the Executive for public investment in affordable

houses and other things than does any other place in Scotland. If we want a capital city that will showcase the country and if we acknowledge the part that Edinburgh plays in the economy of the country, we need capital city funding.

16:39

Ross Finnie (West of Scotland) (LD): It is unfortunate that we have had, for various reasons, a somewhat truncated debate, as housing is an important subject. I welcome the new minister to his position, but he has not helped the tone and tenor of the debate by suggesting that the previous Administration did absolutely nothing about housing. Perhaps he got a little carried away in his enthusiasm in his new post.

Of course we understand that there have been huge changes in the housing market in the past five to 10 years. Nobody could have predicted the housing need in Scotland as a result of the total change in the composition of houses at a time when our population has, at best, been stable; it has actually declined in some areas. Economists, and even certain housing associations, could not have predicted that. General inflation rates have been fairly stable for the past 10 years, but housing inflation has not, I regret to say. Governments of all countries have not readily been able to cope with those two factors.

The minister suggested that the previous Administration did nothing, but it would be unfortunate not to recognise the then record investment in new housing. Malcolm Chisholm mentioned the 8,000 new affordable homes that it was planned to build, which would have represented a 34 per cent increase on previous levels. We should recognise that the empty homes initiative brought another 1,400 houses back into use in Scotland; that the previous Executive set a target of 25 per cent of new housing developments to be affordable; that we reduced the council tax discount on second homes, which released £20 million for affordable housing; and that we promoted the homestake shared equity scheme, which has been widely recognised as having made a singular contribution to dealing with the problem, as has the setting of a homelessness target for 2012—many members have mentioned that. Recognising those facts would have helped. I am not suggesting for one minute that there is not much to be done, but if we are to have a constructive debate on this all-important subject, it would be helpful to acknowledge first, the genuine economic circumstances against which the problem is set, and secondly, that the incremental changes that have been brought about suggest that much needs still to be done.

Such acknowledgement would certainly have made it easier for members to judge the minister's

statement against what has happened. The minister mentioned the key areas, and it would be difficult to suggest that there is substantial disagreement about what the major issues are in respect of affordable housing, or homelessness, or his stock transfer proposals. He told us that he will set up a housing supply task force and he referred to a housing support fund. It was unclear, however, whether he is still stuck with the SNP's manifesto commitment, which has been widely criticised not only by housing experts here; we understand that he lifted the idea from Australia, where it has also been severely criticised. It was difficult to get a handle on what specific measures the minister proposes and, as the SNP is now the Government, we must judge and test it on its proposals.

I hope that, in the weeks and months that follow, the minister will flesh out his ideas on how to deal with the key issues of homelessness and affordable housing, and that he will tell us what the Government thinks is the level of new building that should be achieved—the Liberal Democrats certainly addressed that during the election campaign—and what is meant by supporting small stock transfers. Of course, he may have issues with elements of the Glasgow transfer, but his party appears to oppose that throughout the country.

The debate has not been as constructive and helpful as it could have been, but I hope that the new minister will flesh out the issues that I have mentioned and that he will make available Executive time—many members have suggested that—in which we can have a more substantive debate on an issue so crucial to the people of Scotland.

16:44

Jackson Carlaw (West of Scotland) (Con): The Scottish National Party's fountain of charm, which Mary Scanlon mentioned only a week ago, has suddenly dried up. In that spirit, I begin by repeating the objections that other members have made to the SNP's proposed flagship grant of £2,000 to first-time buyers. The proposal would be expensive; in 2005, such a grant would have cost some £272 million if it had been taken up by the 34,000 first-time buyers. We cannot see how such a grant would be meaningful. We share the view that has been expressed inside and outside the chamber that it might simply be taken for granted and incorporated into property price inflation.

However, there is a more fundamental inconsistency. In recent weeks, both the First Minister and John Swinney have said that they object strongly to the Scottish Conservatives' proposal to extend a council tax discount of 50 per cent to pensioners as the discount would be

universal to all pensioners, which would mean that it would assist better-off pensioners. However, does not the SNP's grant do exactly the same thing? Will not all first-time buyers benefit, irrespective of income? Alex Salmond said that the Queen would benefit from our proposal, as she would get a 50 per cent council tax rebate on Balmoral. However, surely, if Prince William or Prince Harry choose to set up home in Scotland, they will benefit from the first-time buyer grant. That is where the minister and the First Minister stand—they are sometime republicans who are set to launch an initiative, the unintended consequence of which might be to encourage a series of young royals to come to Scotland, tempted by the prospect of a bung from the Scottish Executive for a deposit on their first country estate. How very egalitarian.

Not only is the SNP's policy hugely expensive, it is the wrong response and represents a monumental inconsistency in the principles at the heart of the Government. Why should taxpayers subsidise those who can, ultimately, afford to buy their own home? In any event, if concern for first-time buyers is sincerely held by all the other parties, why did they support Gordon Brown's abolition of the mortgage interest relief at source scheme, which hit first-time buyers especially hard? I well remember the Liberal Democrats in Westminster salivating at the prospect of the abolition of MIRAS.

However, we share the ambition of the SNP to release more public land for housing and will support initiatives to bring that about. We support action on Communities Scotland and look forward with anticipation to the minister's bold thinking in that regard. As Mary Scanlon and Jamie McGrigor have said, there are clear parallels between the SNP's Scottish housing trust fund and the Conservatives' affordable homes trust. We have urged the SNP to overcome its serial objection to the involvement of the private sector, particularly in this area, in which such involvement would have a profound effect, and I am glad to note that the SNP appears to have done so. The involvement of the private sector would make a great difference to first-time buyers and people who undertake essential community roles in nursing, teaching, the police and fire brigades and who are urgently in need of affordable homes in the places where today's report says that, in just three years, the percentage of homes deemed to be unaffordable has increased alarmingly.

I hope that the Executive will listen to us and work with us—whether or not Tricia Marwick thinks that our scheme is preferable—to give effect to a policy that will make a real difference.

The Executive's proposals do nothing about the depressing 46 per cent rise since 1997 in the

number of homeless people and the 123 per cent rise since 1999 in the number of families living in temporary accommodation. That is a grim legacy. I pay tribute to Willie Coffey's thoughtful remarks in that regard.

There is no single solution. However, we believe that housing stock transfer offered meaningful progress and we will continue to urge an area-by-area transfer, which, it seems, the minister has agreed to this afternoon—an even bigger U-turn than hitherto, and the antithesis of the blistering rhetoric employed by the SNP in relation to local referenda. The obvious financial and vital investment benefit is too great to allow us to walk away from the recent difficulty. The option might not strike everyone as being ideal, but it is the only big-bucks show in town and it will make a real difference.

Poor-quality housing is one of the issues that is at the heart of our poor public health record and, frankly, hope is not a strategy.

16:48

Johann Lamont: I start by acknowledging the words of Willie Coffey. Margaret Jamieson was a good friend to those of us on this side of the chamber and we appreciate the comments that he made. We recognise the significant personal challenge that it must have been to make that contribution. If any other members made a maiden speech this afternoon, I congratulate them as well.

On the issue of planning, I refer the minister to the planning advice note on affordable housing, which states that developments are expected to meet a benchmark for affordable housing of 25 per cent. We hope that he will ensure that that is pursued.

I have some respect for Tricia Marwick on housing matters. I say to her that there was a consensus in the previous session on the direction of travel and that housing organisations are not saying that the situation was shameful. No one could credibly suggest that there was not discussion, debate, deliberation and consideration of housing policy at a significant and detailed level over the past eight years. It is misrepresentation to say that the ideas were good but the investment was not there. We know that there were record levels of investment and we all recognise the challenges that are involved in this area. In that regard, however, I ask the minister what investment he is committed to, at this stage, in relation to his proposals.

I am a fan of locally based housing associations. I ask the minister to reflect in particular on the role of Communities Scotland in relation to tenant participation and engagement with communities. I trust that his decisions on Communities Scotland

will not be brought about by pressure from the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth but be based on sound reasoning on communities and housing.

Is the minister committed to increased support for homestake? It is a policy that is popular, targeted and effective. Will he continue to support the policy for 8,000 new homes this year, and will he indicate his targets and the capital programme behind that as well?

Will the minister also clarify the proposal for a £2,000 grant to first-time buyers? It is evident that there are serious questions about that policy. It will be the Labour position that he should simply accept the arguments and move on. If, however, he still wishes to test the policy, I ask him not to use the comprehensive spending review as an alibi. That is a process in which he should be engaged. If he does not reject the £2,000 proposal, will he commit to testing the policy through the parliamentary process? We could take evidence and consider whether it is a credible option, although we would be hard pushed to discover, on current trends, whether it is.

What is the minister doing to ensure the progress of private landlord registration? That was a critical issue in the previous session in relation to safe houses being placed in safe communities. How is he working with the private landlord sector on providing affordable homes and on the question of the voluntary accreditation scheme?

When will the minister provide us with an analysis of the consultation on the purchaser's information pack, and what will his position be on that? Will he tell us what the Government's position is on a single seller survey? Understandably, as home ownership has grown, challenging issues have developed on that, and I would like clarification.

I would reflect on the point that Margo MacDonald made about Edinburgh. It encapsulates one of the challenges for anyone who wants to address the question of housing: where do we invest? Do we invest in prosperous areas, where people are pushed out of the market? We must also recognise the challenge of regeneration. Indeed, one challenge for the Government is that it has separated off community regeneration from community planning. Will the minister commit himself to addressing that problem?

In his summation, I hope that the minister will commit to working with the Parliament and the committees, as well as housing organisations, tenants and communities, in order to ensure success.

Margo MacDonald: I am sure that the member will not want to give the impression that she is

unmindful of those people who work in the public sector, in many cases earning public sector low wages, who try to live in Edinburgh but find that increasingly difficult and without whom this would be much less of a city.

Johann Lamont: I certainly would not want people to have that impression. The challenge that I was posing is that, although we have to address the question in Edinburgh, we also have to recognise that, if we use the test of economic hot spots where people are driven out of the housing market as the means of directing funding, we will also have to address the question of the Scottish housing quality standard in houses that are maintained and to make a commitment to regenerate communities where there is no demand.

That point also relates to the right to buy. I hope that the minister will commit at least to considering flexibility in his approach, because the right to buy has secured mixed communities in some places but done the opposite in others.

I hope that the minister will be able to respond to my comments.

16:53

Stewart Maxwell: I welcome Johann Lamont's comments in her summing up, which reflected much more the tenor of the debate that we want to engage in. I will run through as many of the questions that I took note of as possible.

On the single seller survey and the purchaser's information pack—[*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order. There are too many conversations going on. Will members take their seats, please?

Stewart Maxwell: Thank you, Presiding Officer.

Members will be aware that the consultation on that issue has just finished. We are currently reviewing the submissions and will reach a conclusion in the not-too-distant future.

We see the first-time buyer grant as part of an overall package of measures. Many members have criticised the policy, and it is valid for people to have different points of view. We want them to bring their views and get involved in the discussion on whether it is the right way forward. I am happy to engage with members from throughout the chamber on that basis.

Patrick Harvie: Tricia Marwick said that the housing support fund will not be inflationary if it is properly targeted. If that argument holds for that policy, why does it not also hold for the £2,000 grant? How many first-time buyers will receive the full £2,000 grant, and how many sellers will

happily put £2,000 of taxpayers' money into their bank accounts?

Stewart Maxwell: I said to the member earlier that I disagreed with his comments about inflation in relation to the housing support fund. The support fund that we are considering will be an opportunity to spread low-cost house ownership. It is a shared equity scheme, which builds on the success of the homestake programme. I accept that that has been a good programme, but we can go further and do more. That is the basis of the measure.

Sandra White: The minister will be aware that the Glasgow Housing Association is insisting that owner-occupiers repay moneys for repair within one year. Many people are left in dire financial circumstances as a result. Will he consider that situation, with a view to increasing the time for repayment?

Stewart Maxwell: We have put in place a pilot project in Glasgow through the scheme of assistance, which offers a broad range of financial support to those who are unable to access mainstream lending. I sympathise with the member's comments, but I am sure that she would agree that we want the work to improve properties to go ahead. We must focus on that, as it is the most important issue. As 93 per cent of bills are being paid by owners, it is a relatively small issue, albeit an important one for those who are affected by it.

Moving to speeches from other members, I think that Mary Scanlon's contribution was generally positive. It is entirely legitimate to discuss planning as part of housing. We will be doing so as part of the housing supply task force, as planning is part of its remit. As other members mentioned, community planning is extremely important.

Johann Lamont and Mary Scanlon mentioned the registration of landlords. Unfortunately, progress on that proposal has not been as fast as I am sure many of us would have liked. Some local authorities have made slower progress than others. I will take that up with those local authorities so that—I hope—we can conclude the process of landlord registration much more quickly than has been the case.

Mary Scanlon: Will the member give way?

Stewart Maxwell: No. I really have to get through some detail.

I welcome Tricia Marwick's remarks on the GHA and other points that she raised. The criticism that we have received for bringing a housing debate to the Parliament in the first month of government reflects, interestingly, on the fact that the previous Administration took almost a year to bring a housing debate to Parliament.

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): I am sorry to interrupt, minister. I remind members that there is a coffee lounge at the back of the chamber. If that is where they would like to have conversations, they would be very welcome.

Stewart Maxwell: It is interesting to compare the two Administrations.

Johann Lamont: Will the member take an intervention?

Stewart Maxwell: No. I do not have time.

I admire Jamie McGrigor's arithmetic, but it illuminated a particularly prevalent problem, which I accept is faced by many people in rural Scotland. I also accept his point about water and sewerage and the joined-up thinking that we must have if we are going to make progress.

Hugh O'Donnell spent an awful lot of his time on the first-time buyer grant. It would have been better if he had spent more time focusing on the bigger issues of housing in general, such as the overall lack of housing in Scotland, than on a small part of the issue. However, it was entirely his decision to raise that issue.

Malcolm Chisholm made an interesting and welcome contribution on the need to build more affordable housing. I could not agree more. We support the 2012 target. We cannot carry on in the way that we have been over the past few years. We must have change, because if we do not, we will not meet the 2012 target and we will not satisfy tenants and people throughout rural and urban Scotland.

Willie Coffey made an excellent maiden speech. I particularly welcome his comments on his predecessor, Margaret Jamieson. I echo his comments on Danny Coffey. His tribute to Danny was heartfelt and reflected the view of many members, particularly those in the Scottish National Party. It was an excellent first contribution.

Margo MacDonald mentioned that tenants are a priority. I accept that—it is the core point. The outcome that we are trying to achieve is what is best for tenants. That is the fundamental point that I was trying to put across. I agree with her comments on the right to buy and pressured areas. Edinburgh certainly might have that problem. I am happy to look sympathetically at any applications from areas that are under pressure. If they bring the matter to me, we can have a look and consider whether it is reasonable to give them an exemption.

The Presiding Officer: You should be closing now, minister.

Stewart Maxwell: I finish by noting that many members mentioned the Shelter-led campaign for

30,000 new social rented homes during the next three years. Members cannot expect me to anticipate the outcome of the forthcoming spending review, which will determine investment levels in housing after 2008, but we are determined to make the housing system as a whole work better to deliver more houses, including all forms of affordable housing.

I hope that I made it clear in opening the debate that increasing the overall supply of homes is a key objective for the Government and is important for the prosperity of our nation. I conclude by repeating that we are determined to make the housing system meet the needs and aspirations of all our people. I stress our desire to work with everyone who can contribute towards that end.

Presiding Officer's Ruling

17:01

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): Before I move on to the next item of business, I wish to respond to a point of order that Johann Lamont raised earlier this afternoon and to which I said that I would respond later. I have now had the opportunity to investigate the issues that she raised and I am grateful for members' forbearance.

As I hope members know by now, I take seriously the provision of information to the Parliament and I will always try to ensure that the Parliament is treated with the respect that it deserves. I believe that it is good practice for material that is relevant to debates to be issued in good time by those who sponsor debates. Doing so, however, remains a matter for those who release the information and is not governed by any formal rules or guidance.

On the specific points that Johann Lamont raised, I can find no evidence that relevant information was released to journalists or lobbying organisations before being given to the Parliament, or that any rules or guidance were breached by today's events. However, I repeat my strictures of yesterday. I suggest that the Executive reviews its practices in this regard and reflects on what I said yesterday.

Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer—[*Interruption.*]

Members on the Government benches seem very upset, but this is a significant issue to do with respect for the Parliament. I seek clarification on the question that I raised about parliamentary questions and the use of holding answers. Presiding Officer, do you know when authority was given by Stewart Maxwell's office for release of the substantive answers to my questions? Had he cleared those before I made my point of order after First Minister's question time? If so, I wonder whether you have asked him why he did not explain that to the chamber. Perhaps you could seek clarification of why the substantive answer was then released at half past 1. Also, what was the response to your comments on the use of holding answers, and will you explore whether embargoed copies were issued to anyone? Will you ask the Executive why it would place an embargo on a document that it acknowledged was significant to a debate? I ask you to explore further the substantial issues to do with the lack of information that was available to members.

The Presiding Officer: Given that no rules have been broken, I do not think that that is a point of order for the chair. However, I have made it clear

that there are substantive issues. I hope that we can now move on. No rules have been broken—I am clear about that.

Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body Motion

17:03

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): The next item of business is consideration of motion S3M-212, in the name of Tom McCabe, on behalf of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, on the Scottish Commission for Public Audit.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees to the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body's proposal to appoint Robert Brown, Derek Brownlee, Angela Constance and George Foulkes to be members of the Scottish Commission for Public Audit.—
[Tom McCabe.]

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

Business Motion

17:04

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S3M-220, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Wednesday 27 June 2007

2.30 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Ministerial Statement: Transport

followed by Executive Debate: Transport

followed by Business Motion

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 28 June 2007

9.15 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Ministerial Statement: Approach to the Strategic Spending Review

followed by Executive Debate: Health and Wellbeing of the People of Scotland

11.40 am General Question Time

12 noon First Minister's Question Time

2.15 pm Themed Question Time—
Rural Affairs and the Environment;
Health and Wellbeing

2.55 pm Debate on the Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Amendment (No. 2) (Scotland) Regulations 2007

followed by First Minister Statement: The Council of Economic Advisers

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

and (b) that the period for Members to submit their names for General and Themed Question Times on 6 September 2007 should end at 12 noon on Wednesday 27 June.—
[Bruce Crawford.]

Motion agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motion

17:04

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): The next item of business is consideration of motion S3M-215, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on substitution on committees.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees the following nominated committee substitutes, as permitted under Rule 6.3A—

Scottish Liberal Democrat Party

Audit Committee Iain Smith

Economy, Energy and
Tourism Committee Liam McArthur

Education, Lifelong Learning
and Culture Committee Hugh O'Donnell

Equal Opportunities
Committee Jim Tolson

European and External
Relations Committee Jeremy Purvis

Finance Committee Ross Finnie

Health and Sport
Committee Mr Jamie Stone

Justice Committee Mike Pringle

Local Government and
Communities Committee Robert Brown

Procedures Committee Alison McInnes

Public Petitions Committee Jim Hume

Rural Affairs and
Environment Committee John Farquhar
Munro

Standards and Public
Appointments Committee Mike Rumbles

Subordinate Legislation
Committee Margaret Smith

Transport, Infrastructure and
Climate Change Committee Tavish Scott.—[Bruce
Crawford.]

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

Decision Time

17:04

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson):

There are 10 questions to be put as a result of today's business.

In relation to this morning's debate on the Olympic games, if the amendment in the name of Stewart Maxwell is agreed to, the amendments in the names of Johann Lamont and Nicol Stephen will fall. If the amendment in the name of Johann Lamont is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Nicol Stephen will fall.

The first question is, that amendment S3M-204.3, in the name of Stewart Maxwell, which seeks to amend motion S3M-204, in the name of Murdo Fraser, on the Olympic games, be agreed to. Are we all agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Ahmad, Bashir (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)

Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Tymkewycz, Stefan (Lothians) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

AGAINST

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)

Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

ABSTENTIONS

MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 49, Against 78, Abstentions 1.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S3M-204.1, in the name of Johann Lamont, which seeks to amend motion S3M-204, in the name of Murdo Fraser, be agreed to. Are we all agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marilyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)

Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

AGAINST

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Ahmad, Bashir (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)

Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)
 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 Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 Tymkewycz, Stefan (Lothians) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

ABSTENTIONS

Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 62, Against 62, Abstentions 3. I am therefore required to use my casting vote. The business manager has been informed that I will vote against the amendment, which therefore falls.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The third question is, that amendment S3M-204.2, in the name of Nicol Stephen, which seeks to amend motion S3M-204, in the name of Murdo Fraser, on the Olympic games, be agreed to. Are we all agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Ahmad, Bashir (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)

Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)
 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 Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 Tymkewycz, Stefan (Lothians) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

AGAINST

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)

Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

ABSTENTIONS

MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 65, Against 62, Abstentions 1.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S3M-204, in the name of Murdo Fraser, on the Olympic games, as amended, be agreed to.

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)

McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 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)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

AGAINST

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Ahmad, Bashir (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)

Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Tymkewycz, Stefan (Lothians) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

ABSTENTIONS

Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 45, Against 79, Abstentions 2.

Motion, as amended, disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S3M-201.4, in the name of Des McNulty, which seeks to amend motion S3M-201, in the name of Derek Brownlee, on council tax, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)

Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

AGAINST

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Ahmad, Bashir (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)

Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)
 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 Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 Tymkewycz, Stefan (Lothians) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

ABSTENTIONS

MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 62, Against 65, Abstentions 1.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The sixth question is, that amendment S3M-201.2, in the name of Tavish Scott, which seeks to amend motion S3M-201, in the name of Derek Brownlee, on council tax, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

We are? [*Laughter.*]

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: I did not think so. I thought that I had a nice surprise there for a minute. There will be a division.

FOR

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Ahmad, Bashir (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)
 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 Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 Tymkewycz, Stefan (Lothians) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

AGAINST

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)

Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

ABSTENTIONS

Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 64, Against 62, Abstentions 2.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S3M-201.3, in the name of Robin

Harper, which seeks to amend motion S3M-201, in the name of Derek Brownlee, on council tax, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

AGAINST

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Ahmad, Bashir (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)

Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 Tymkewycz, Stefan (Lothians) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 49, Against 78, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S3M-201, in the name of Derek Brownlee, on council tax, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Ahmad, Bashir (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)
 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 Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)

Tymkewycz, Stefan (Lothians) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

AGAINST

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

ABSTENTIONS

Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)

The Presiding Officer: It has gone very quiet all of a sudden.

The result of the division is: For 64, Against 62, Abstentions 2.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Parliament believes that local income tax, which is based on ability to pay, is a fairer system of local taxation than the discredited and unfair council tax and notes the position of the Green Party in regard to land value taxation.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S3M-212, in the name of Tom McCabe, on the Scottish Commission for Public Audit, be agreed to—if anybody is listening.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees to the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body's proposal to appoint Robert Brown, Derek Brownlee, Angela Constance and George Foulkes to be members of the Scottish Commission for Public Audit.

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S3M-215, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on substitution on committees, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees the following nominated committee substitutes, as permitted under Rule 6.3A—

Scottish Liberal Democrat Party

Audit Committee	Iain Smith
Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee	Liam McArthur
Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee	Hugh O'Donnell
Equal Opportunities Committee	Jim Tolson
European and External Relations Committee	Jeremy Purvis
Finance Committee	Ross Finnie
Health and Sport Committee	Mr Jamie Stone
Justice Committee	Mike Pringle
Local Government and Communities Committee	Robert Brown
Procedures Committee	Alison McInnes
Public Petitions Committee	Jim Hume
Rural Affairs and Environment Committee	John Farquhar Munro
Standards and Public Appointments Committee	Mike Rumbles
Subordinate Legislation Committee	Margaret Smith

Local Food

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S3M-28, in the name of Jim Hume, on local food. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament recognises the benefit to our health, the environment and Scotland's farmers, fishermen and rural areas of choosing more local, fresh, seasonal produce; believes that by specifying requirements for freshness, delivery frequency, specific varieties and production standards the public sector can take a lead in the promotion of local food; notes the success of the East Ayrshire school meals pilot in showing how procurement rules can promote locally grown food and support Scotland's local suppliers; considers that the school meals pilot should be rolled-out across Scotland, and recognises the importance of action across the public sector to encourage the procurement of more locally grown produce.

17:16

Jim Hume (South of Scotland) (LD): I am delighted to talk about procurement in the public sector of locally grown, fresh and seasonal produce in my and the Liberal Democrats' first members' business debate of the session. I am sure that we will have a valuable discussion.

Local food procurement for public agencies can help with three contemporary issues—health, wealth and our mother earth. On health, Scotland is seen as the sick man of Europe, which is ironic given the quality of the produce on our doorstep, for which we are famous. Surely we have a great opportunity to improve that image and create a new culture of healthy and nutritionally aware youngsters who are excited by food, so starting in our schools is most appropriate.

Food that is procured locally needs fewer preservatives and retains its nutritional value better, because of shorter supply chains. If food is locally grown, children understand better how their food appears. That is why I want what is happening in East Ayrshire and the project with Tayside schools to be rolled out throughout Scotland. More than that, I want the whole public sector to follow that example.

As for wealth, using local produce has economic benefits. A new guide to public procurement from the New Economics Foundation shows how local authorities and other public bodies can use their purchasing power to promote local economic development. The report concluded that providing high-quality, competitively priced food in schools, hospitals and local authority facilities is possible. Local suppliers can deliver food that is cheaper and healthier and can help the public sector to find ways to deliver additional food items and possibly

even to save public money. Of course, that cannot be achieved overnight. Public tenders must address the fact that local food supply chains will have to start from scratch in some areas, but anything is possible, if the will exists.

As for our mother earth, we all talk about climate change daily. The Parliament held two debates on the subject last week; I participated in both. Sourcing food thousands of miles away cannot be good for our environment, never mind the sometimes questionable traceability and animal welfare issues. The Stern report of 2006 said:

"What we do now can have only a limited effect on the climate over the next 40 or 50 years"

but

"what we do in the next 10 or 20 years can have a profound effect on the climate in the second half of this century".

Encouraging the public sector to use local produce is one measure in the fight against climate change, which we discussed this afternoon.

Local food is not just an agenda item for rural communities. In our urban green spaces, we still have a strong community of allotment growers. Societies such as the Scottish Allotments and Gardens Society are in a prime position to provide niche products in the new food supply chains that will be required, which will save green spaces in our cities.

Relevant examples are spread randomly all over the United Kingdom already. The headteacher of Whalsay high in Shetland recently spoke passionately about his school's rural skills course and about efforts to provide seasonal and healthy school meals by using fresh local produce. The school enlists the help of a local crofter to teach and give practical work experience while children participate in the rural skills course. They learn about where their food comes from and how it is grown and looked after, and they learn about animal husbandry. An additional benefit of the course is that many of the children say that they want to go into the agriculture industry when they leave school—an excellent example of sustainability at work.

In East Ayrshire, the school meals pilot project has worked well. There has been no additional cost to the local authority and £160,000 has been generated for the local economy. Parents have become engaged and the catering staff are now enjoying working with proper, fresh and seasonal produce. The East Ayrshire pilot project has proved sustainable and is seen as a model for best practice.

The what's on your plate? campaign of the National Farmers Union Scotland, which was launched last week, highlights the importance of understanding food sourcing. I am sure that Mr

Lochhead heard all about the campaign today, during his visit to the Royal Highland show. In addition, Northumberland County Council's project resulted in roughly £1.5 million being invested back into the local economy. I could go on citing such examples.

Often, the barrier is seen as procurement rules—free-market philosophy versus sustainability; however, that need not be the case. In fact, article 26 of the public sector directive states:

"Contracting authorities may lay down special conditions relating to the performance of a contract ... The conditions governing the performance of a contract may, in particular, concern social and environmental considerations."

France, Italy and parts of Scandinavia already have successful purchasing systems that push the competitive balance in favour of small, local producers. Their mechanisms to promote local purchasing are all similar to the East Ayrshire project and concentrate on freshness, by enhancing the local aspect as a quality factor; seasonality, demanding domestic varieties—perhaps a threat to having strawberries for the Christmas school dinner; organic production, which automatically favours local producers as the organic industry is far more fragmented than the conventional industry; and contracts that can be broken down into small lots, thereby allowing small producers to bid for parts of contracts.

The benefits of local food produce are clear to see: it is not rocket science. Public procurement is a powerful tool in ensuring sustainability. I sincerely hope that the Parliament and the Executive can work in conjunction with the public sector in achieving more locally produced food in our public services. It has been said that local procurement is the litmus test of the public sector's commitment to sustainable development. It is also the litmus test of the Executive's commitment to the health, economy and sustainable development of our great nation. I look to the minister and cabinet secretary for assurances that every effort will be made to engage with the public sector on the issue and that the Executive will deliver on this cross-party manifesto promise for our health, wealth and mother earth.

17:23

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): I congratulate Jim Hume on his contribution and recognise other members who have taken part in such debates before, including John Scott and Alex Johnstone—who would be here if he was not at the end of a tug-of-war rope. I also mention that Sarah Boyack, John Scott, Jim Hume and I will be the four cross-party MSPs engaged in Scottish food fortnight.

The debate has been going on for quite a while in the Parliament. I am glad that Jim Hume has focused on public procurement, which is an issue that I have raised several times. There is guidance issued by the Executive although, unfortunately, it is lumped in with freedom of information guidance for local authorities. The most up-to-date guidance is from December 2004. During the passage of the Schools (Health Promotion and Nutrition) (Scotland) Bill, the issue was raised with the minister and his answer was that

“the bill will give schools and local authorities an opportunity to develop a school meals service through which pupils become educated consumers who understand health, environmental and wider issues.”

He continued:

“We intend to reissue the guidance when the eventual act is commenced, to remind local authorities of what we are saying to them.”—[*Official Report, Communities Committee*, 6 December 2006; c 4421.]

Now that we have new ministers in place, that guidance must be revisited and extracted from the freedom of information guidance. It must be issued as guidance in its own right, but I do not think that that has been initiated.

In 2006, the Environment and Rural Development Committee did a report on its inquiry into the food supply chain, which dealt with public procurement; I defer to the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment, who probably knows much more about the subject than I do. I do not like some of the soundbites in the report. For example, the use of the phrase “value for money” suggests that only the bare costs should be considered. Although importing something from France might make it cheaper to buy, that could have wider costs to the community, such as the loss of local jobs. As I have said before, it is possible to engage in creative contracting. Those are not a lawyer’s weasel words—it can be built into a contract that there must be local sustainability. By including conditions to do with the sustainability of small communities, local authorities and other public bodies can avoid breaching European Union competition rules. I hope that we get a move on with that work because it has been due for a long time.

A separate issue is supermarkets and consumers. We have battered the supermarkets about procurement for a long time, not just because they buy in bulk and do not often buy locally, but because they determine what we grow and, now, the breeds of animals that we keep. I went to an extremely interesting presentation on the food chain by Michael Greger MD, who is director of public health and animal agriculture at the Humane Society of the United States. He explained that the fact that we are putting flocks of hundreds of thousands of birds into sheds where

viruses multiply means that we are likely to have bird flu pandemics. Such practices are engaged in at the behest of the supermarkets and, indirectly, the consumer.

I realise that I have introduced an issue that is separate from procurement, but it is essential that we tackle it. I ask the ministers to examine the intensive breeding of animals to produce cheap food. We must get away from the idea that cheap is best. Our food may be as cheap as chickens, but it may cost us a flu pandemic.

17:27

Cathy Jamieson (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab): It is some time since I have had the opportunity to participate in a members’ business debate, so I am delighted that Jim Hume has chosen such a valuable topic and one that is both close to my heart and relevant to my home territory.

There is no doubt that sustainable development is one of the big challenges that we face. One way of tackling the issue is to develop awareness of food and health choices among the young people in our schools and to link that to our concerns about environmental stewardship.

There have been some rather unfair caricatures of me as someone who favours certain supermarkets, which will remain nameless. However, I am more likely to be found with a bag of organic vegetables grown in my constituency, as John Scott will probably confirm. As the Parliament’s resident vegan, I was delighted to go to a primary school in East Ayrshire and to be able to choose a healthy and nutritious meal from a standard menu without having to tell people in advance what I could and could not eat. I would certainly not have been able to do that many years ago, when I was at school in the area.

The project in East Ayrshire, whereby the work that has been done through the Executive’s hungry for success initiative and the introduction of a whole-school approach to school meals has been linked to the wider community plan, has been award winning. We in the Labour Party recognised the importance of that project by including in our manifesto a firm commitment to develop the work that East Ayrshire Council had begun. I must pay tribute to the former councillor and convener of the education committee, Tommy Farrell, and Robin Gourlay, who works for the authority, for their efforts to progress the scheme.

Local sourcing of food has been important to the East Ayrshire project and the council has worked closely with the Soil Association. In primary schools in the area, there has been an increase of 4 per cent in the uptake of school meals by young people, which I believe is better than the national

trend. The council has also made it clear that school food should not necessarily equate to inferior or cheap food.

Twenty-six schools throughout East Ayrshire have purchased all their fresh produce from within a radius of about 30 miles of Kilmarnock. That includes fresh meat from Afton Glen farm in New Cumnock, in my constituency, artisan cheese from Dunlop dairy in Stewarton, in the next-door constituency, and milk from Clyde Organics in Lanark, as well as free-range eggs, locally grown vegetables and fruit, and fresh fish. The way in which the food is presented in schools gives young people new opportunities to try out different foods, to taste things that they may not have had before and to encourage their parents to make local purchases.

More can be done in the public sector; I had a particular interest in the food that was provided in our prison system. I hope that the new Executive will see that there are opportunities to ensure that we use local produce and provide in our other public sector organisations the same range of nutritious food that we provide in our schools. Perhaps the minister will reflect on that issue with those of his colleagues who have responsibility for justice.

I congratulate the member and hope that when summing up the minister will give a commitment to support local authorities such as East Ayrshire in continuing this valuable work.

17:31

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): I begin by declaring an interest in the debate, as a farmer, as a stallholder at the Ayrshire farmers market, as the chairman of that co-operative group and as a past chairman of the Scottish Association of Farmers Markets. I congratulate Jim Hume on lodging his first motion for a members' business debate in the Parliament on local food and, like Christine Grahame, welcome him to the growing band of parliamentarians who are enthusiastic about the concept. I also welcome Cathy Jamieson's new-found enthusiasm for the issue.

It is entirely appropriate that the debate is happening today, on the first day of the Royal Highland show. Having seen the minister at breakfast and at lunch, I am glad to see him here this evening, too. I welcome the good turnout of other members at the show and their interest in this debate.

This motion, and similar motions in the past, catches the growing public mood in favour of buying local, eating local. Nowhere is that mood more prevalent than in the food hall of the Royal Highland show, which both the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment and I visited

today. A sense of enthusiasm and awakening for the potential of local food production, local processing and local consumption is in the air—one can almost reach out and touch it. Rural Scotland has again found a cause that excites it and that brings out the best can-do attitude in our farmers, our food producers and processors and our restaurateurs. For me, as a pioneer of farmers markets and local food, that is a cause for celebration.

I have always supported our industry-led organisations—the Fatstock Marketing Corporation, the Scottish Quality Beef and Lamb Association and its successor, Quality Meat Scotland—in the promotional work that they have done. QMS, which kindly gave me breakfast this morning, must be encouraged and supported under Donald Biggar's steady, sensible leadership, as must its dedicated staff. We must applaud QMS's work in promoting local beef, lamb and pork. We must also welcome the supermarkets' increasing enthusiasm for the local food concept. At the moment Tesco may be leading the way in that regard but, having met Stuart Rose of Marks and Spencer and Justin King of Sainsbury's today, I know that they, too, are embracing the concept.

Local food also supports our tourism industry, with Scotland becoming a destination of choice for discerning gourmets. David Whiteford and his team are helping to lead that charge, through EatScotland. I understand that food tourism as an industry now brings almost £1 billion a year into our economy and is a growing market, although sadly not enough of it is based on local produce. The good work of Walter Spiers and the Scottish Shellfish Marketing Group is an example of best practice, through co-operation and seizing the initiative. The Mussel Inn restaurants in Glasgow and Edinburgh are now supplying prime Scottish seafood to the discerning, who would normally have to go to Spain or the south of France to sample Scotland's finest seafood.

The Scottish Agricultural Organisation Society deserves both a mention and increased support for the work that it does in spawning rural co-operative development. I must also mention the growing importance of farmers markets and farm shops—supported by SAOS—which are the very embodiment of the local food concept and have done so much to raise local food up the political agenda. I hope that representatives of the farmers markets will visit us again in Parliament in September, during Scottish food fortnight.

Consumption of local food is also good for our environment, as it reduces our carbon footprint. As other members have pointed out, we must take note of that issue, which relates to sustainability,

when contemplating the future of public procurement contracts.

The Scottish diet action plan suggests that consumption of more local, less processed, fresher food is likely to lead to a healthier population. With childhood obesity such a concern in clinicians' minds at the moment, the Government must look to local food to provide some of the solutions in the public health area.

Jim Hume mentioned the East Ayrshire schools project—I know that similar schemes are being considered in Perth and Kinross. Perhaps they should now be rolled out across the country.

All the above ideas chime with the NFUS's campaign to promote local food, and I welcome its initiative on misleading labelling of food, which highlights a major concern that we all share. I know that the minister heard all about the practice today, and I am certain that he shares my view that it must stop. If he can achieve greater clarity of labelling, particularly with regard to country of origin, he will have the support of producers and consumers alike. As well as giving consumers a real choice, such a move will give Scotland's food the chance to be promoted as such.

I welcome the opportunity to contribute to this worthwhile debate. I intend to return to the Royal Highland show tomorrow and urge any member who has not been before to visit it either tomorrow or over the weekend and experience for themselves the optimism about and enthusiasm for the idea of local food. They will see some of Scotland's finest livestock—much of it is of world-class quality and is a tribute to Scotland's breeders and stockmen. In short, an educational and enjoyable experience awaits them.

17:36

Liam McArthur (Orkney) (LD): I, too, congratulate Jim Hume on securing this debate. He has a long-standing interest in farming and has done a great deal to support farming communities, particularly in the Borders.

The debate is timely. This morning, I had the pleasure of visiting the Royal Highland show at Ingliston—although I note my position in the food chain, as I was invited neither to breakfast nor to lunch. My visit certainly provided further evidence of the wide range and high quality of Scottish produce. However, on my way there, the bus crashed into a taxi and then got caught in a logjam of traffic from the Gyle to Ingliston. As a result, I must make a personal, impassioned plea for the Edinburgh airport rail link to be taken forward without delay.

In Orkney, we are perhaps blessed more than most. Indeed, Orkney Island Gold and Orkney the

Brand have proved particularly successful in highlighting what my constituency has to offer. The quality of the beef, lamb, fish and shellfish is being held in increasingly high regard in Scotland and internationally. Moreover, on the drink front, we have whiskies such as Highland Park and Scapa, a range of beers and the Orkney Wine Company. All of that shows that by harnessing innovation with local produce we can have a great impact both in sustaining a local economy and in securing success in international markets. As Jim Hume said, such moves are good for the economy. I am certainly looking to work with the local council and the tourism and retail sectors to see what more can be done in that respect. Christine Grahame's point about supermarkets was very valid.

As for health benefits, I should, to avoid any accusations of hypocrisy, say that my own diet leaves an awful lot to be desired. I can do no more than strive to improve it. Although Orkney might enjoy advantages over less fortunate parts of the country, the options across Scotland for selling and serving a wide range of healthy local produce are extensive.

The previous Executive did a lot to establish health promotion on the agenda—in that respect, Cathy Jamieson was right to allude to the hungry for success programme—but Scotland still performs appallingly. The recent report from the Federation of Small Businesses highlighted the impact of health on our economic performance, but the situation also has very real and serious social implications. I believe that the campaign for local food can play an important role in rectifying matters.

As far as the environment is concerned, today's statement on climate change makes this debate all the more timely. Reducing food miles will help not only to achieve the objectives that the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth set out this afternoon, but to assure consumers about the production of what they consume.

This timely and worthwhile debate offers hope that we can make progress in procurement, in spreading best practice and in raising consumer awareness. I again congratulate Jim Hume on securing it and wish all those who are attending the Royal Highland show—John Scott, in particular—an enjoyable and successful weekend.

17:39

Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): I, too, congratulate Mr Hume on securing a debate on an important issue.

I acknowledge the contribution that has been made in this area by my predecessor as MSP for East Lothian, John Home Robertson. In the previous session of Parliament, he successfully

argued for the inclusion in the Schools (Health Promotion and Nutrition) (Scotland) Bill of sustainability and fair trading as two of the criteria that local authorities should consider when procuring food or catering services. In that debate, John rightly highlighted the success of East Ayrshire Council and North Lanarkshire Council in sourcing food locally when possible. As Christine Grahame said, procurement is the key.

The benefits of local food are increasingly apparent: many members have already spoken of them. Local food is certainly good for the economy. In advance of the debate, I visited the excellent East Lothian food and drink website that East Lothian Council set up and which I recommend. In its directory, I found no fewer than 53 food and drink producers and specialist retailers in my constituency alone. Some of the firms are small, but they sustain employment and contribute significantly to the wealth of the county.

Local food is also good for the environment, reduces congestion on our roads and improves road safety. However, the Royal Highland show clearly does not do that, given Mr McArthur's experience earlier today. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs estimated in 2002 that food miles result in over 17,000 injuries and 290 deaths from road accidents. That is as compelling a case as any for reducing the distance between where food is produced and where it is subsequently consumed.

The roots and fruits healthy eating project in East Lothian is funded primarily by East Lothian Council and NHS Lothian. The scheme delivers low-cost fresh fruit and vegetables to hundreds of customers across 19 towns and villages in East Lothian, encourages healthier eating and provides access to good-quality fruit and vegetables—locally produced, where possible—to local communities at affordable prices. The scheme works with schools to increase awareness of how our food is produced, particularly through working in the scheme's own vegetable garden. I was pleased to attend the scheme's 10th anniversary event recently. Similar schemes are proving to be successful around Scotland.

Like other members, I welcome the NFU Scotland campaign—what's on your plate?—which is aimed at encouraging consumers to buy Scottish produce. I was pleased to pledge my support to the campaign earlier in the week. Furthermore, the launch this month of Scotland Food and Drink is a positive development, bringing together food industry interests from trade bodies and companies to secure a stronger and more profitable food industry in the years ahead.

I cannot claim the level of engagement with farmers markets that John Scott can claim through his involvement in the farmers market movement,

but I am a regular customer at the Haddington farmers market. It is an excellent event and its strength is that almost all the food on sale is local, being from either East Lothian or Berwickshire, including the legendary ostrich burgers, which come from just up the road from Haddington. I welcome the support that is given to the farmers market sector by bodies such as SAOS. Will the minister say in his summing-up speech what support the Executive might plan to give the sector to sustain and grow farmers markets in Scotland?

I am glad to have had the opportunity to take part in the debate. I hope that the minister will consider seriously a framework that favours a more local and sustainable trade in food and which moves that agenda forward as fast as possible, for which, as Mr Scott said, there is a great appetite.

17:44

Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con): I, too, congratulate Jim Hume on bringing the debate on local food to the Parliament. I also congratulate NFU Scotland on its campaign to encourage people to make an informed decision to buy Scottish food and drink. I welcome NFU Scotland's plans to hold a range of events, from school visits to farms, to information campaigns outside supermarkets.

With members' indulgence, I suggest adding a sixth aim to the five aims of NFU Scotland's what's on your plate? campaign, although it digresses slightly from the motion. The aim would be to provide sufficient ground for people who would like to grow their own food. The Scottish Allotments and Gardens Society estimates that there is a shortfall of 3,000 allotment plots in Scotland and that that shortfall is likely to increase.

Research shows that up to 20 people can benefit from the produce of one allotment. Allotments provide positive benefits. The health benefits of eating fresh fruit and vegetables are well documented—and, of course, fresh fruit and vegetables taste so much better. My father had an allotment in the immediate post-war years, so I was reared on home-grown vegetables of a quality and variety that were unknown to most of my peers. That gave me a taste for healthy eating that many of my contemporaries in north-east Scotland do not begin to understand.

Growing our own fruit and vegetables can have a positive effect on our mental well-being. We all remember Prince Charles's famous admission that he talks to his plants. He said that his plants provide some of his more illuminating conversations, with no risk that what he says will be repeated in the media. I find nothing more relaxing than hand-weeding in my garden, when I

can lose myself in daydreams—I might be sad, but I enjoy that.

I welcome moves to use locally produced and sourced food for school meals. The project in East Ayrshire and similar projects in Perth and Kinross have transformed school meals in those areas, where 70 per cent of food is sourced locally. Those examples prove that obstacles can be overcome and that our children can be provided with fresh, local produce. They also demonstrate that Scottish farmers are capable of supplying the markets. Enthusiasm for the projects among parents, pupils and teachers is high. As John Scott said, Conservatives support calls for the development of such initiatives throughout Scotland.

Farmers markets and farm shops are good things. Like other members, I am a regular customer, up in the north-east. It is clear from the growth and success of farmers markets and farm shops that more and more Scottish consumers want to know where the meat they eat was produced and to be able to talk to the farmer about how the animals were raised and fed.

It is sad that there no longer seem to be seasons for our food. Raspberries are now an all-year-round fruit, as are strawberries and blueberries. Fruit often lacks flavour because it has ripened en route to the supermarket in darkness, rather than in sunshine. That was brought home to me when I was on holiday in Cyprus: the locally grown oranges tasted quite different from those that we buy here—the same thing applies to our home-grown crops when they are eaten in season.

I recently visited Milton of Lesmore farm shop, near Rhynie in Aberdeenshire, to see at first hand the field-to-plate success that takes our food supply back to basics. The farmer, Michael Williamson, is passionate about producing the best beef possible by breeding and rearing his beasts on the farm, taking them individually to the abattoir to avoid stressing them, and investing in on-site processing facilities. He sells the meat from the farm shop or at local farmers markets, so there are almost no food miles to calculate. Members should believe me when I say that the food tastes fantastic.

The decisions of Scottish consumers will play a vital role in the growth of a sustainable local food network. It is apparent that Scottish consumers want to give active support to Scottish farmers. We need to change our habits and become a nation of shoppers who follow the simple rules suggested in the NFU Scotland campaign: shop locally, and buy seasonal produce grown in Scotland and the United Kingdom. I am pleased to support the motion.

17:48

Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): I draw members' attention to my membership of the Soil Association.

I congratulate Jim Hume on securing the debate and I pay tribute to John Scott, without whose work on farmers markets during the past decade this would not have been such an informed debate. John Scott has done a tremendous amount on local food in Scotland.

I will make three points. First, members have explained the many benefits of locally grown food. There is nothing better than food that is grown not just locally, but by oneself. I draw the minister's attention to the slow progress that has been made in Scotland on support for allotments, not just in cities but in small towns and rural areas. Allotments afford not only the advantages of fresh food but the social advantages that come from the almost therapeutic effect of producing one's own food. My wife and I have taken our approach to home-grown food a step further; we grow our lettuces on the windowsill behind the kitchen table, so I can reach behind me and pluck a fresh lettuce leaf to eat with any meal we prepare for ourselves.

My second point relates to the whole effect of farming, and it brings us back to the point about the contribution that using local food can make to reducing global warming. If we grow food using less intensive methods or, preferably, organic methods, we will produce a further reduction in global warming gases, because the whole kit of intensive farming, transport and food processing produces up to 17 per cent of the effects on global warming caused by advanced industrial societies.

There are many aspects to consider, but one is the use of nitrogenous fertilisers. The energy that goes into the production of nitrates makes an important contribution to global warming gases, so the fewer nitrates we use as fertilisers, the bigger our contribution—in the context of this afternoon's announcement—and the better things will be.

My final point relates to the reduction of food miles in the tourism industry. I would like to relate a little tale about a little hotel that I stayed in up in Nairn. The hotelier is very proud of the fact that most of the food that he produces, cooks and lays on the table can be labelled with exactly where it came from. That is extremely popular with guests not only from Britain but from abroad. The hotelier says that his ambition is to be able to say, for example, that the milk in the jug—and I stress the word "jug", because there are none of those horrid little plastic packets—comes from Daisy, who at this very moment is in the corner of that field in that particular nearby farm.

17:52

Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands (Con)): I congratulate Jim Hume on securing this very important debate. I expect that his father would want us all to eat local Scottish lamb, and I would certainly agree with that. I commend the NFUS on its recent efforts in that regard, and I particularly recommend Highland heather-fed blackface lamb, which stands out in excellence. Jim's father would probably say that the Cheviot is better, and we must not forget the Shetland either.

I recently attended the Kintyre working group in Campbeltown, where local food as a tourist attraction was on the agenda. It is still an enigma that we in Scotland have the highest-quality lamb and beef and yet, in some hotels, people are still offered microwaved slabs of something that tastes like shoe leather. We also have the finest hard-shell prawns, or langoustines, in the world, but members should try getting them in Scotland, where the average so-called prawn cocktail contains frozen foreign pink shrimps adorned with a piece of lettuce. If we go to France, we find that local food is not only served, but highlighted in festivals and fairs. If we go to Spain—to Seville or Barcelona, for example—we will find the west coast Scottish prawns, but at huge prices.

Thanks to people such as John Scott, and thanks to the Highland show, we are improving. Places such as the Oyster Bar in Cairndow—which has a famously political car park—produce excellent shellfish. I am thinking too of the Mussel Inn in Edinburgh and the Seafood Cabin in Skipness in Argyll, which is a must for any visitor who likes scallops or queenies.

I recently visited an excellent celebration of local produce at Inveraray primary school, where pupils from primaries 4 and 5 hosted their very own farmers market. Those inspired children have done a project on how food gets from the field to the plate. The Argyll and Bute procurement officer, Alan Brough, told the people assembled that more and more local food was being used in local schools—meat, vegetables and fish. That is a very good thing for our people, our children and our local farmers, crofters and fishermen.

Good local food ingredients are great assets for Scotland. Members should go and see them at the Highland show tomorrow—if they have not been already. We must continue to expand the use of local food in Scotland.

17:55

The Minister for Environment (Michael Russell): I pay tribute to Jim Hume for securing the debate. Like Cathy Jamieson, this is my first members' business debate for quite some time, but I remember these debates with great affection,

because they are broader and more knowledgeable than normal chamber debates. It was not I who observed that, but Winnie Ewing, who was a great fan of these debates and would always wait in the chamber to take part in them.

The debate has united the Parliament's best-known vegan—perhaps its only vegan—with its best-known carnivore. It has brought in the Parliament's best-known prawn fancier, too—Mr McGrigor's knowledge of nephrops is legendary.

It is entirely fitting that the debate is taking place on the first day of the Royal Highland show, as many people have observed. Perhaps we would have had a larger audience had we held it in the show ring, but, in any case, it has been an informed debate.

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment, along with others, has been at the show and has met key individuals in all parts of the food supply chain, from producers right through to the main retailers.

The motion debated reflects some of the key concerns of the new Scottish Government. I will run through our five strategic objectives and link them to the concerns raised in the debate.

We want a Scotland that is wealthier and fairer. Scotland's farmers and fishermen work to the highest standards of quality and sustainability. By encouraging people to buy local, we will ensure that the wealth generated by locally produced food remains more fairly in the hands of communities.

As many members have observed, we want a healthier Scotland. Scotland undoubtedly has some of the best natural produce and the most skilled food and drink producers in the world. It stands to reason that by encouraging a greater local consumption of our wonderful quality food and drink, we will contribute to the better health of our population, particularly our school children, who would get a positive experience of food at school by eating tasty, fresh, local produce.

I pay tribute to the hungry for success scheme, which has been a wonderful success, and to schools such as Inverary primary school and their class teacher, Fiona Hamilton, who did such inspiring work to show how important local food is to the area and the school.

There is no doubt that, as Liam McArthur and others have observed, our national diet has been—and in some places still is—notoriously poor. That is why it is all the more important to promote the very best locally produced proteins and meat, encourage greater consumption of our traditional catch of mackerel and herring, which are rich in omega 3, and take all the benefits from vegetables, as Cathy Jamieson does.

We want a safer and stronger Scotland. We have to have confidence in the way that our food is produced throughout Scotland so that we know that it will conform to the highest food safety standards and that we can promote it locally.

We want a smarter Scotland. We need to encourage people in Scotland to know more about their food and understand its great benefits and how to prepare it. We need to ensure that from the earliest stages in school children ask, "Where did that come from?" "What is it?" "How can we use it?" and "How can we get more of it?" We must ensure that at every stage, particularly in relation to school meals—I will mention the East Ayrshire project and other projects in a moment—local food is coming into schools and engaging the curiosity and interest of every child in them.

As Robin Harper and others said, we want a greener Scotland. We need to consider ways to shorten the food chain from farm or net to plate so that we can reduce the environmental impact of transport emissions, among other things. By encouraging greater diversity in land use and innovation in sustainable production methods, we will maintain and improve Scotland's natural environment.

Christine Grahame: This might be a pre-emptive strike—the minister is smiling, so it probably is—but will the minister consider the guidance that is issued to local authorities on public procurement, because I do not think that they are all being as excellent as East Ayrshire Council?

Michael Russell: I was smiling only because Ms Grahame is well-known for her pre-emptive strikes.

The reality is that of course we will make absolutely certain that the guidance is not only adhered to, but improved.

The issue of food miles has been raised frequently in the media and in the Parliament. We must not be over-simplistic about it. The definitions that we apply will be important but, in general, we are keen to see primary producers and others in the food and drinks industry working more closely together to shorten the supply chain as much as possible between producer and consumer.

A number of members have mentioned allotments. There is a strong desire in Scotland to ensure that the use of allotments is as widespread as possible, but there is a shortage of them. We must turn our attention to that matter.

I am pleased that the five strategic themes that I have mentioned will underlie everything that the Scottish Government does. That means that we have ambitious plans for Scotland's food and drinks industries. Today, my friend the Cabinet

Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment announced the creation of an enhanced resource in the Scottish Executive for dealing with food and marketing policy. The new dedicated resource will consider how best to deliver an overall package of support to our food industry that will facilitate the higher uptake of local food in public and private domestic markets. I hope that, in time, it will help to grow local producers' capacity to respond. Mr Hume knows that ensuring that the capacity exists to fuel and increase demand is a key issue—I see Mr Scott nodding. Farmers markets have been an important part of that. In that context, I pay tribute to John Scott, as I have often done.

Sarah Boyack (Edinburgh Central) (Lab): We know that we are importing much more organic produce, but a key issue is the capacity of organic producers in Scotland to meet the consumer demand that now exists. Will the minister deal with that point? There has been much cross-party agreement on the need to do more and to develop the existing organic action plan in that respect.

Michael Russell: I acknowledge that. Indeed, £20 million more than previously is available for organic produce in the new Scottish rural development programme. We will continue to build that capacity.

We have talked about East Ayrshire Council's groundbreaking work. What has happened with respect to procurement is important; indeed, East Ayrshire Council's work is already being replicated in places in the Highlands and Islands and in Tayside. Important lessons have been learned, and local authorities and other public bodies, such as health trusts, are considering ways of increasing their use of local, fresh and seasonal produce of high nutritional quality.

John Scott: Will the minister take an intervention?

Michael Russell: I am sorry; I am in my final minute.

We will continue to learn lessons and to expand the work that I have mentioned.

I take the point that Cathy Jamieson made about prisons. It is entirely appropriate that people who are doing porridge should have Scottish porridge, and we will ensure that that happens.

In conclusion, the Government recognises the role of food production in sustaining rural economies and communities, and it is useful to be reminded of that role by Jim Hume. I thank him for doing so. We support the provision of fresh local produce through a range of outlets, and we will ensure that Scottish food businesses have the opportunity to grow by supplying local, domestic and other markets. We know how important food and the environment are. Jamie McGrigor talked

about food and tourism. Food is central to who we are and what this country is. The Government will do all that it can to ensure that it fulfils the objectives that I have outlined.

Meeting closed at 18:03.

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

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

The deadline for corrections to this edition is:

Thursday 28 June 2007

PRICES AND SUBSCRIPTION RATES

OFFICIAL REPORT daily editions

Single copies: £5.00

Meetings of the Parliament annual subscriptions: £350.00

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

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS weekly compilation

Single copies: £3.75

Annual subscriptions: £150.00

Standing orders will be accepted at Document Supply.

Published in Edinburgh by RR Donnelley and available from:

Blackwell's Bookshop

**53 South Bridge
Edinburgh EH1 1YS
0131 622 8222**

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

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

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

Telephone orders and inquiries
0131 622 8283 or
0131 622 8258

Fax orders
0131 557 8149

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

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

Scottish Parliament

RNID Typetalk calls welcome on
18001 0131 348 5000
Textphone 0845 270 0152

sp.info@scottish.parliament.uk

All documents are available on the Scottish Parliament website at:

www.scottish.parliament.uk

Accredited Agents
(see Yellow Pages)

and through good booksellers