

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Thursday 31 January 2008

Session 3

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Scottish Parliament

Thursday 31 January 2008

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

Passenger Transport

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson):

Good morning. The first item of business is a debate on motion S3M-1246, in the name of Des McNulty, on accessible passenger transport and the national concessionary fares scheme.

09:15

Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab): Yesterday, Mr Brownlee and Mr McLetchie met the Scottish National Party high command—another day, another dirty deal from the right-wing alliance. Recently, Tory concerns over the bus service operators grant were deemed so important that they were raised at First Minister's question time, but the Tory trumpet was laid aside as soon as the walls of Jericho looked like being breached. Even being generous, one could hardly describe the Conservative amendment as being forward looking, but perhaps—just perhaps—other parties have priorities that mean that disabled people and fare-paying passengers can be neglected for the moment.

The Government claims to be at the forefront of reducing carbon emissions, which in transport can best be achieved through modal shift—encouraging people out of their cars and on to public transport. Buses are the most widely used form of passenger transport. They are vital for those who do not have ready access to a private car, and they are the most flexible alternative to car use for those who do. Over the past 10 years, more than £400 million has been invested in new vehicles that are in service in Scotland—more than 4,000 cleaner, more accessible buses for Scotland's passengers. In 2006-07, bus operators increased commercial bus service mileage by 8.8 per cent over the previous year, travelling an additional 16 million miles.

Continuation of that investment and service growth is vital if progress is to be made in addressing climate change. Why, when the United Kingdom Government is providing support to maintain services and hold down fares south of the border, is the SNP Government tilting the playing field against bus users and bus operators by capping the bus service operators grant north of the border? Why are the Tories and the Greens supporting the Government?

There should be incentives for those who provide more accessible services or who invest in more environmentally friendly vehicles. However, newer, Euro-standard engines, which emit fewer pollutants, use more fuel, and wheelchair-accessible buses are typically heavier and also use more fuel. If the Scottish Government withholds money to offset fuel duty, national operators will have a perverse incentive to put into service in other parts of the UK vehicles that are newer or more accessible or which have lower emissions, resulting in poorer-quality services, unhappy passengers and an ageing fleet in Scotland.

The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): Will the member tell me the average fuel consumption of a Euro 4 bus and a Euro 1 bus, to justify his claim that they use more fuel?

Des McNulty: I refer the minister to the technical experts and the operators, who are clear that that is the case.

The Government has produced allocations for the bus service operators grant that it knows are inadequate. It anticipates legitimate audited claims totalling £5 million in excess of budget in 2007-08 and 2008-09. However, it is the refusal to match the UK Government's support for the bus industry that makes it more likely that fares will be jacked up, frequency of services reduced and routes cut in Scotland than in other parts of the UK. Further, rural Scotland will suffer most.

It is not just the bus service operators grant allocation that is inadequate. The provision to fund the concessionary fares scheme is well below current funding levels, despite evidence of increasing passenger uptake. I have no problem with the Government seeking to drive a hard bargain with bus operators, but all the evidence suggests that those allocations will precipitate a funding crisis for the concessionary fares scheme, if not this year then next. If the Scottish Government is unwilling to make adequate financial provision for the scheme, it must take responsibility, not pass the costs on to fare-paying passengers.

It is arguable that the concessionary travel scheme for elderly and disabled people that was pioneered by the Labour-Liberal Democrat Administration is, along with the smoking ban, the greatest achievement of devolved government. It is being copied elsewhere in Britain.

Stewart Stevenson: Would the member care to identify any difference between the concessionary fares scheme that is operating now and the one that his party introduced?

Des McNulty: The point is to change it and to improve it.

Stewart Stevenson: So Labour got it wrong.

Des McNulty: No. We want to see it improved.

The success of the scheme has raised the hopes not only of SNP back benchers but of members on this side of the chamber that the scheme could be extended to cover those who are on the lower rate of disability living allowance. They are currently excluded, even though people in that category were previously eligible for free travel under regional schemes in some parts of the country.

Mr Salmond's customary smirk turned into a scowl yesterday when he was questioned about the abolition of the Mobility and Access Committee for Scotland. Perhaps he knew that members of that body would be among those arguing most strongly in favour of the change that is proposed in the motion. They are joined by organisations such as Enable Scotland and Capability Scotland, which were mentioned in a motion on concessionary travel in the name of Angela Constance, which many members from all sides of the chamber signed. My colleague Charlie Gordon lodged a similar motion, once again attracting substantial cross-party support. Why, then, will the minister not accept the views of those behind him as well as those in front of him—I am thinking of the disability organisations to which the First Minister said yesterday he would be responsive—and extend the scheme to all those who qualify for disability living allowance? While the minister is considering that reasonable request, he may wish to reflect on the terms of a motion that he lodged in 2006, which called for community transport to be brought within the concessionary travel scheme, allowing older and disabled people in rural areas where there are few alternatives the vital opportunity to get around.

I am sure that there are other opportunities for improving the scheme at little or no extra cost. In view of the subsidies that are already paid by the Government in support of rail services, what would be the marginal cost of allowing older and disabled people off-peak access to local train services, filling empty seats, as happens in greater Manchester? The chance to build on one of the solid achievements of devolution, while contributing significantly to social inclusion and climate control, should be grasped. Regrettably, the dance between the SNP, the Tories and the Greens over who can claim what when their deal over the budget is clinched means that disabled people must wait and bus passengers must suffer.

I hope that Parliament will support the motion. Labour will support the Liberal Democrat amendment. Members should give careful consideration not just to my views but to the arguments of passengers, operators, disability groups, representatives of rural areas and other

MSPs. If the minister cares to re-read the speech that he gave in 2006 on community transport, he may even agree with himself.

I move,

That the Parliament notes the importance of accessible passenger transport to achieving the Scottish Government's climate change objectives and in tackling the significant inequalities in Scottish society; expresses concern over capped allocations for reimbursement for concessionary travel and the Bus Service Operators Grant over the next three years and the implications for fare-paying passengers; urges ministers to reconsider their decision not to increase the Bus Service Operators Grant in line with the support given by the UK Government to bus service providers in England and Wales; calls on ministers to urgently review the national concessionary travel scheme to extend eligibility to disabled people in receipt of the lower rate of disability allowance and to older and disabled people using community transport in rural areas, enabling these extensions to be introduced by the parliamentary summer recess, and invites ministers to consult users, passenger service operators and the Parliament on other desirable changes to the scheme.

09:23

Alison McInnes (North East Scotland) (LD): I welcome the opportunity to debate these important and interlinked issues. Greater accessibility for all will best be delivered by co-operation among and joint initiatives involving the voluntary sector, commercial bus operators, local authorities and the Government. That was the approach of the previous Administration, and it resulted in more investment in new routes, cleaner engines and more accessible buses. It brought greater access, freer movement, less isolation and modal shift. Investment from local authorities and the Government in bus infrastructure, such as bus priority measures, real-time information and park and ride, has demonstrably led to improved provision. We have heard from Des McNulty about the investment of £450 million in new vehicles and the 8.8 per cent increase in the mileage covered by buses.

Buses are often the best and most cost-effective public transport solution in many parts of Scotland. Flexible and responsive, they reach the parts that other heavy infrastructure does not. Community transport and demand-responsive transport weave a web, joining it all up and providing cost-effective solutions in remote and rural areas and areas that are ill served by commercial services. For a truly integrated public transport system, we need to support community transport and DRT. The Government's proposed changes to DRT support have unsettled those who work in the sector. The 2006 review of DRT services, which the previous Executive commissioned, recommended that the rules for the BSOG should be amended to include more DRT operations and that there should be increased support for community transport. Moves by Tavish Scott to respond to those

recommendations and to build capacity at a regional level have been undone by the decision to remove responsibility from regional partnerships and end the ring fencing that secured that valuable service.

Stewart Stevenson: Will the member take an intervention?

Alison McInnes: No. I am sorry, but I have lots to say this morning.

DRT is the flexible friend of the traditional bus; it helps to tackle dispersed demand in a cost-effective way. The day-to-day service is influenced by the demands of the users, which ensures that long, tortuous routes do not need to be developed to pick up everyone who might want to travel and that people are more encouraged to use the bus. It is a bespoke service—the Savile Row of bus services.

Using new technology, such as the global positioning system, routing software and call centres, provides opportunities to increase the benefits of community transport and local authority transport in a more coherent way. We should do more of that.

The SNP professes to be in favour of public transport, but the draft budget tells a different story and reveals a distinct lack of support for it. We see cuts in the bus service operators grant and concessionary fares and the ending of schemes such as the DRT grant, the rural public transport grant, the bus route development grant, the public transport fund and the integrated transport fund. Over the next three years, the Government is cutting funding for bus services by 9.2 per cent in real terms. There is not one mention of support for local bus services in its spending priorities for local government in the budget document.

The SNP is uncomfortable this morning, because the reality is that it has raided the budget for support for buses and concessionary fares to pay for big promises elsewhere; it is short-changing passengers and undermining investment.

As Mr McNulty said, the concessionary fares scheme has been a great success. With Lib Dem transport ministers in the previous Executive, we led the United Kingdom with a free travel scheme for elderly and disabled passengers that benefits more than a million Scots. That groundbreaking initiative was rolled out to include discounted fares for young people, which benefits a further 200,000 Scots. The scheme has been due to have a review, and it is time to embark on it.

The full benefits of concessionary fares are not felt in rural areas and areas that are less well served by traditional bus services because community transport services are not currently

eligible to take part in the scheme. I would like that to be resolved sooner rather than later.

Changing the eligibility of lower mobility claimants is also something to be aspired to, and that, too, must be resolved.

Stewart Stevenson: Will the member take an intervention?

Alison McInnes: No, I will not. I have lots to say.

I recognise that such changes will require extra provision in the budget. The agreement with bus operators for the first three years is that they should be no better off, and no worse off, as a result of the scheme. An extension of eligibility will mean that further funding will have to be made available to ensure that that remains the case.

We know that the Government's decisions mean that the budget is under pressure, and I have already heard talk of how the Government is planning to restrict demand. Sadly, it is possible that we will see less eligibility, not more.

During the Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee's investigations into the Government's budget, I revealed that bus operators in England and Wales are now benefiting from compensation for the higher fuel duty bills that they face, but that there are no plans to introduce a similar proposal in Scotland.

The BSOG helps bus operators to assist passengers by keeping fares down and retaining marginally viable routes. The grant is mileage based and is therefore especially important for rural areas.

Bus operators have planned and budgeted for a fair deal on fuel duty compensation in line with the rest of the United Kingdom. Some of the improvements that bus operators have invested in, such as Euro-standard engines and wheelchair-accessible buses, use more fuel, thus increasing costs.

Operators and passengers are entitled to feel let down by this Government. The situation will be particularly damaging for small rural service operators, which are already at full stretch financially. If bus operators are not adequately compensated for the fuel duty that they pay, their only options are to cut services or raise fares. The result will be greater pressure on local authorities to pick up services that are no longer commercial.

The bus industry cannot be expected to continue to deliver patronage growth and modal shift and contribute to a reduction in emissions if the Government increases the tax on fuel and squeezes the concessionary travel reimbursement. Sadly, the evidence points to a Government that is willing to pass on to others

responsibility and costs for the provision of a sustainable public transport network. The losers will be bus passengers and the environment.

I move amendment S3M-1246.2, to insert at end:

“recognises the valuable contribution that Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) can make to social inclusion and accessibility, particularly in rural areas and for disabled and elderly passengers; notes with concern that the Scottish Government’s budget has caused uncertainty over the future of DRT provision; considers that expansion of DRT is an essential aspect of improving accessibility in Scotland, and therefore calls on ministers to end the uncertainty and develop DRT services in Scotland.”

09:29

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I welcome this Labour debate on transport, even if it seemed that Mr McNulty had not read the Green amendment before he accused us of supporting the Government on the level of the BSOG.

The debate gives us an opportunity to examine some comments that have been made by Labour and Liberal Democrat MSPs on transport. For example, during the budget debate last week, Iain Gray said:

“we suggest that the Government invest a little less in Scotland’s tarmac and a little more in Scotland’s talent”.

In the same debate, Des McNulty said that he hoped that the Greens were listening as he complained:

“This Government is putting more money into roads and diverting money away from rail and other public transport.”—[*Official Report*, 23 January; c 5304, 5359.]

Alison McInnes has been quoted in the press making many of the same criticisms.

That is interesting and even exciting. If we got an answer to the question of which road projects Labour and the Liberal Democrats now want to be scrapped—I have a list to choose from—we would be really on to something. If we got agreement on that, we could set the cat among the pigeons. However, I suspect that we will not reach an agreement. I suspect that Labour and the Liberal Democrats, Scotland’s finest purveyors of climate-wrecking road projects since 1999, are being the tiniest bit disingenuous in those attacks. I want to see less road building, and I have to say that the Greens are the only party that is doing anything about that.

Des McNulty: I notice that Brian Adam has moved away from Patrick Harvie, but, in crafting his amendment, did the SNP come to Patrick Harvie, or did he go to the SNP? How much of it is his words and how much of it is the SNP’s words?

Patrick Harvie: Brian Adam’s movements are no concern of mine, and the words in the amendment are my own.

It is clear that real changes are needed in the SNP’s spending plans on transport. Even if there is not a majority for scrapping the more ludicrous road projects, I hope that there will be a majority for improving the public transport offer.

A real-terms cut in the BSOG, which is indicated by the SNP’s current plans, would feed through to higher fares and reduced services for passengers throughout the spending review period. If members in the Parliament are remotely serious about the familiar aspiration of modal shift, we cannot tolerate that.

Throughout my lifetime, there has been a long-term trend towards ever more expensive public transport, while the cost of owning and running a car has stayed pretty much the same in real terms and is much more affordable. It should be clear that if we want the transport sector to pull its weight in the transformation that climate change demands, we must reverse that trend. If the sector does not pull its weight in moving towards the 80 per cent cut and we get, for example, only a 50 per cent cut from it, we will need a 90 per cent cut from the rest of the economy. That option is unacceptable.

We need to do more than express concern about the level of the BSOG; we need to make a clear call for a substantial increase, and my amendment does that, although only for 2008-09. We must also take a longer-term look at the grant. It is still basically fuel-related, so we are potentially subsidising less-efficient vehicles. I hope that we will take a more thorough look at potential restructuring, so that we pay to move passengers rather than to burn fuel.

As for concessionary travel, there is a strong case for reviews not only by Government but by Parliament, with the objectives of maximising public benefit, making public transport more accessible, getting the best value for public money and ensuring that our systems for delivering the scheme do not replicate all that is worst about many information technology systems in Government. There are privacy issues, as the scheme mirrors aspects of the UK’s identity register scheme. Such measures are not necessary for the provision of bus passes.

I hope that the Government and all political parties are willing to take those ideas on board.

I move amendment S3M-1246.1, to leave out from “expresses concern” to end and insert:

“recognises that it is vital that accessible and affordable public transport is available to help the Scottish Government to meet its climate change objectives and to ensure the continuation of vital urban and rural services; calls on the Scottish Government to provide a substantial increase in the budget for the Bus Service Operators Grant in 2008-09 and to consider keeping fares more affordable for the longer term; notes the Scottish Government’s

intention to review the national concessionary travel scheme, and calls on ministers during that review to ensure that they maximise the benefits for the public throughout Scotland while guaranteeing the best return on a scheme which represents a significant investment of public money."

09:33

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con):

It is my pleasure to speak in the debate, essentially to support the Greens' amendment and to move a small amendment to it.

The process that we now go through in this Parliament is different from the one that existed in recent years. I am delighted that I have the full and undivided attention of the Labour Party, because I will address Labour members in the first instance. I remind them that something happened last May and that they are no longer in government. That means that, regardless of what they may think, they are no longer in a position to force—belligerently—their views on the Parliament.

Now, with a minority Government, when we debate subjects such as this, each of us in the Parliament must seek to take possession of the issues in proportion to our efforts and the work that we have done previously—whether the motion is lodged by the Labour Party, the minority Government, the Liberals or even the Greens. That means that Des McNulty this morning is in the unique position of having managed to isolate himself on a subject on which most of us agree with him.

Today, we are trying to build a composite amendment—a term that Labour members should understand well, as the Scottish Trades Union Congress and Labour Party conferences usually work on that basis—that will deliver a majority vote in the Parliament. That is why I, as a Conservative, find myself in the unusual position of supporting a Green party amendment. That amendment makes two key recommendations that the Conservative party supports.

Annabel Goldie raised the issue of the bus service operators grant at First Minister's question time before Christmas, and we continue to work to overcome the problems with the grant. We continue to be strong on that issue.

Des McNulty: Will the member take an intervention?

Alex Johnstone: I have only four minutes.

The second issue is the need for a Government review of the provision of concessionary fares. We would support such a review because we believe in the concessionary fares system and want it to work as it was intended to work. Need I point out that it was the Labour Party and the Liberal Democrats, in government, who introduced the present scheme? That scheme, which levelled up

in some areas and down in other areas, has left me with a full mailbag and queues at some of my constituency surgeries of people who used to be entitled to concessionary travel but who are no longer entitled to it under the national scheme.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): Will the member take an intervention?

The Presiding Officer: The member is in his last minute, I am afraid.

Alex Johnstone: My constituents, who were previously entitled to concessionary travel but are no longer entitled to it—those who are on the lower rate of disability living allowance—want the issue to be addressed. I hope that the Government will review the scheme.

Our amendment will, if it is agreed to, improve the Green amendment. If it is not agreed to, we will support the amendment in the name of Patrick Harvie because we believe that that will produce an appropriate response by Parliament on this important issue. I have considerable sympathy for the Liberal amendment and will consider the possibility of finding a way to support it at decision time.

I move amendment S3M-1246.1.1, to insert at end:

"and notes that Labour and Liberal Democrat ministers in the previous administration chose not to grant eligibility to disabled people in receipt of the lower rate of disability allowance and to older and disabled people using community transport in rural areas when they created the National Concessionary Fares Scheme."

09:38

The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): I personally use sustainable mass transport—the bus—whenever I can. I have made 55 journeys in that way since May, and I am among the 87 per cent of users who have expressed satisfaction with the level of service.

Buses support economic growth and accessibility and reduce emissions, contributing to a wealthier, fairer and greener Scotland. We have around 1.1 million national entitlement card holders, which represents a major success, and we have maintained the agreement with the Confederation of Passenger Transport to conduct a major review of the scheme in its third year of operation—the review will start later this year. We will consider the eligibility criteria that were established by the Labour/Liberal Administration in the light of some current difficulties, to which members have already referred. I can announce today that, with the collaboration of Epilepsy Scotland, we are able to make a change in some of the administrative arrangements, which will shortly give epilepsy sufferers who cannot be

issued with a driving licence faster and easier access to the concessionary card.

Jackie Baillie: I welcome the minister's administrative changes for those who suffer from epilepsy. Will he tell the chamber how long it will be before he commences a review on extending the other eligibility criteria?

Stewart Stevenson: I have already said that the review will start this year.

Jackie Baillie: So—three years on.

Stewart Stevenson: It has been three years since you introduced the scheme about which you are complaining.

The Presiding Officer: Minister, I did not introduce any scheme. Please do not address members directly.

Stewart Stevenson: Buses are part of an array of sustainable transport solutions that we will need in the future, and we will help local transport authorities and operators to ease congestion, free up bus lanes for their proper purpose and deliver the transport planning tools that are required. Those include bus priority measures, park-and-ride facilities, traffic management policies, traffic regulation conditions, punctuality improvement partnerships, quality partnerships and affordable parking. The Scottish Government, the bus industry and local authorities are working together through the action plan for buses.

I am pleased to advise the chamber that we are also working with the industry to create a more environmentally focused bus service operators grant, which is moving away from a mere fuel subsidy. We are also considering tying payments to actions that reduce emissions, improve access, increase passenger numbers and improve quality on our network. We are working to improve accessibility on the rail network, too, with a major shift to electric traction on the railways and the long-term aim of complete electrification by about 2030. We are driving forward our climate change objectives for 2050 and improving access to public transport.

The Scottish Government will support bus transport with around £260 million this year to help with the cost of fares, to encourage bus route development, to enable older and disabled people to gain access to bus services and to enable transport authorities to support essential services that are not commercially viable. We are providing local government with record levels of funding to enable each local authority to deliver bus provision to meet local needs and priorities, including DRT, which is something that Alison McInnes advocated when she was the chair of the north east of Scotland transport partnership. The focus is on local decisions to meet local needs.

Buses are an important part of the transport solutions that we need to deliver on our climate change agenda. They are accessible to passengers and will continue to be supported by the Scottish Government.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes the opening speeches and we now come to the open debate. Speeches should be kept to four minutes. Members will have picked up that the time for debate is pretty tight.

09:42

Shirley-Anne Somerville (Lothians) (SNP): Improving access to safe, reliable public transport is vital to cutting social exclusion, especially among the disabled and the older generations. The SNP Government recognises the valuable contribution that has been made by the national concessionary travel scheme in widening travel opportunities, increasing independence and reducing isolation. The Government is all about improving the well-being of Scotland's population, and I must admit that the initiative is one of the more welcome things that we have inherited from the previous Executive.

I also welcome Labour's recognition of the significant inequalities that exist in Scottish society, which worsened under the previous Administration's watch. There is merit in the motion's proposal to review the decision to exclude people on the lower rate of disability living allowance from the national concessionary travel scheme. However, let us bear in mind the fact that the decision to exclude that group was made by the previous Administration. Always striving to fix the mistakes of the past, the SNP Government will review the scheme as the minister has suggested, and I am sure that the matter will be given due consideration at that time.

I wonder when Labour decided that the issue needed urgent attention. It was obviously not when Labour was in government, when it could have made the change at any time. It was not during the analysis of the budget by the Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee, as no amendment was forthcoming. The matter was not tabled at the Finance Committee, nor was it mentioned in the stage 1 debate. However, I suppose that it is a case of better late than never.

In the spirit of consensus, I note that there is a case for the provision of additional support for bus operators. I am pleased that the minister has announced that there will be changes and that the Government is seeking to review the scheme. Nevertheless, it is worth re-emphasising that the most severe financial pressure that affects operators around the country is the high level of duty that they have to pay on fuel, which is set by

the Labour Government at Westminster. Just as with the proposed changes to the concessionary travel scheme, Labour members are demanding urgent action now from the Scottish Government on the issue, even though no attempt was made to amend the budget in that respect either. That is further proof that the Labour Party is all talk and very little action.

Putting the issue of timing aside, I presume that the members on the Opposition benches are aware of the fact that increasing the bus service operators grant and extending the entitlement to concessionary fares to potentially 11,500 more people will have a financial cost at a time when we face the toughest financial settlement since devolution.

Even at this late stage, there is still time for Labour to let us know how it would fund those proposals. I have a suggestion. We could save £500 million by scrapping the scheme to build a single tram line on Edinburgh's number 22 bus route. I look forward to hearing members from all parties who voted for the scheme, especially those who were elected from outwith Edinburgh, explain to their constituents why it is better to spend £500 million on such a folly of a project rather using that money to improve public transport in their area. I also look forward to hearing the same members explain to the disability groups that were mentioned earlier why that decision was made.

There are many other significant barriers to accessing public transport for Scotland's older and disabled population. That is why the SNP is investing heavily across the country to improve our neglected and struggling transport infrastructure. That is why the transport budget represents the biggest spending portfolio outside local government. That is also why Scotland's transport network will flourish under the SNP Government, which is investing wisely for our future.

09:46

James Kelly (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to take part in the debate and to highlight the benefits of bus travel to the economy. However, as I was walking down to the Parliament this morning, a passing bus went through a large puddle and splashed me with water, so my enthusiasm for buses dimmed somewhat at that moment.

Transport is a major issue in my constituency of Rutherglen, partly because we have a larger than average number of pensioners and also because some people do not have cars—in fact, a third of Scots do not have cars. Bus and other transport links are very important in allowing people to access major centres such as Glasgow and East Kilbride and services such as hospitals. From

many parts of my constituency, it takes more than two bus journeys to get to hospital.

I support many of the positive comments that have been made about the concessionary scheme. When I spoke at a meeting of the Rutherglen Workers Educational Association recently, its members told me that one of the biggest benefits that they have received since devolution is the concessionary travel scheme. Politics is about making a difference. The scheme makes a difference because it allows older people to get to places in Scotland that they might not have visited for quite some time, such as Oban.

I also support the extension of the concessionary travel scheme to those who are on the lower rate of the disability living allowance. That issue was raised by a number of my constituents.

There is a concern about the bus service operators grant. In the current budget, it flatlines at £57.5 million per year. That means that, over the next three years, there will be no cash increase and a real-terms cut. The effect of that will be to put Scotland at a £7.5 million disadvantage to England and Wales. If we continue at that level, the gap will grow to £26.5 million over the next three years. That point was raised at First Minister's questions on 20 December but, as ever, we did not get a straight answer from the First Minister.

The present level of funding could also have an adverse effect on bus fares and an impact on bus routes. Fares could increase and a number of bus routes could be withdrawn. In my constituency, routes have been withdrawn in recent times, but we have conducted campaigns and managed to get some of them reinstated, most notably those to Cathkin and Springhall. The withdrawal of bus routes has a knock-on effect, particularly for pensioners. It also has an environmental impact, given that the increase in the number of bus journeys in recent years has helped us to meet climate change targets as well as boosting the economy. The issue is also one of social justice, as fare rises and cuts in bus routes and services hit pensioners and the less well-off hardest.

This is an important issue and, as with many such issues, the devil is in the detail of the SNP's budget. Examining the budget closely shows the flatlining of the bus service operators grant, which means a cut in real terms. I welcome what has been said about the review of the concessionary travel scheme and strongly support additional funding and the extension of the scheme to those who are on the lower rate of disability living allowance.

09:50

Ian McKee (Lothians) (SNP): First, I will declare an interest. As a person who has reached the age of 60, I am the proud possessor of a concessionary bus pass and I use it to the full. Indeed, twice in recent months, I have used it on what some might regard as an impossible journey, from the Edinburgh suburb in which I live to Kilchoan at the very end of the Ardnamurchan peninsula. As members can imagine, the journey is lengthy, but it is well worth the effort. For the first time in years, I was able to view the beauty of Loch Lomond, the grandeur of Rannoch Moor and the majestic peaks of Glen Coe without having to keep my eyes on the road and concentrate on driving.

However, the most illuminating point of the journey came when I transferred to the bus from Fort William to Kilchoan. At the bus stop, I was joined by half a dozen elderly folk, each with a packed shopping trolley. I wondered how they were going to get it all on the bus. My question was soon answered when the bus arrived. Driver Gordon MacKenzie unloaded each person's shopping trolley into the boot of his bus, allowing them to return the trolley and reclaim their pound coin. Then the bus was driven to every person's home and Gordon carried their purchases along the path right up to the front door. We did not arrive at our final destination exactly on time, but who cares? Especially as Gordon drove me an extra three quarters of a mile to my ultimate destination because it looked like it was going to rain. I was not surprised, but I was delighted all the same, when Gordon won the Highland and Islands Enterprise award last year for his outstanding contribution to the community of Lochaber. I am sure that the chamber will share my pleasure at his recognition.

However, there is a darker side to my story. It is true that the bus service is much appreciated, as is the concession, because otherwise many of the elderly people living on the peninsula would not be able to afford the regular shopping trip to Fort William, which is 50 miles away. However, the service runs only once a day and there is only one route. People of all ages who wish to visit friends in other local communities, shop in the local store, use the post office, go to church, or use the new community hall are forced to use private transport. Today, the price of diesel at the small Kilchoan filling station is 118p per litre. The inhabitants of Kilchoan live in an oil-producing country, but they pay one of the highest prices in the world for the fuel that they need to go about normal, everyday activities.

It is against that background that Des McNulty moved his motion today. I congratulate him on the elegant way in which he promoted an extremely

thin case. His and his colleagues' somewhat synthetic indignation must be judged in light of the fact that, as my colleague Shirley-Anne Somerville said, his party lodged no amendments during the budget process and in light of the assurances that we have received from the minister.

What is needed is not so much an extension to the concessionary scheme, or even an increase in the bus service operators grant—beneficial though such action would be—but a reduction in the swingeing fuel taxes, especially in rural areas. In the past two and a half years, small bus operators have seen their fuel costs escalate by 43 per cent, thanks to the greed of successive Labour chancellors, and the same is true for the owners of private transport. The folk on the Opposition benches who support Des McNulty's motion should ask why artificial transport subsidies have assumed such prominence and examine their own consciences in the matter.

09:54

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): In the short time that is available to me, I will focus exclusively on concessionary travel. There is no doubt in my mind that Labour's concessionary travel scheme has delivered enormous benefits for pensioners and disabled people throughout Scotland by building on the 16 separate schemes that operated in local areas, all of which had different criteria. Now pensioners and the disabled can travel for free, from Dumbarton to Dunbar and up to Dingwall—the same set of criteria applies regardless of where in Scotland they live. Such has been the success of the scheme that the number of passenger journeys has grown year on year, as the minister helpfully acknowledged.

However, as we have heard, some people have lost out—those who are on the lower rate of disability living allowance, who previously enjoyed concessionary travel in many areas of Scotland, including Strathclyde and Fife. The Tories and the SNP do the Parliament no credit if all they do is seek to lay blame. Adopting that attitude amounts to nothing more than a smokescreen for inaction. There was absolutely no intention to exclude that group of people. When the problem emerged—I will come on to the timing and the cost—after the transitional year to the national scheme, members across the political divide were rightly concerned.

Alex Johnstone professes to want what I want, which is the inclusion in the present scheme of people on the lower rate of disability living allowance, but his amendment does not say that, nor does the Greens' amendment. If you mean what you say—I believe that you do—

The Presiding Officer: Please avoid the second person, Ms Baillie.

Jackie Baillie: If the member means what he says, I am sure that he will want to support Labour's motion. Failure to do so will demonstrate a complete disregard for the genuine concerns of people who have learning disabilities.

For the benefit of Shirley-Anne Somerville and Ian McKee, let me turn to the timing and the cost. In the first year of the new national scheme, anyone with a local concessionary pass was automatically transferred and issued with a national entitlement card without having to be reassessed. Most people would not have realised that the rules had changed. As those cards have come up for renewal, many people are now being told—often wrongly—that they do not qualify for a card under the new national eligibility criteria. That is a particular issue for adults with learning disabilities, and it is causing considerable distress to them and their families, as members will know from their postbags.

We were first alerted to the problem not in April 2007 but after May 2007, so the fixing of it falls to this Government. Enable and Capability Scotland realised that there was a difficulty when people came forward to them in the summer and autumn of 2007. I respectfully say that the issue at stake is not a budget matter—the suggestion that it is another smokescreen. When the old scheme was rolled forward, it was not acknowledged that a number of the people who had previously qualified for concessionary travel would no longer qualify for it in the future. The minister does not need to wait until 2009 or 2010 to take action; he could do so now.

We seek two solutions from the minister. First, we want him to change the law now to extend eligibility for concessionary travel. That would be the right and proper thing to do. Secondly, he might want to consider improving the procedures and guidance to ensure that people who qualify for the scheme get the right advice and support to enable them to access it.

09:58

Jamie Hepburn (Central Scotland) (SNP): The Labour motion suggests that ministers should review the national concessionary travel scheme with a view to extending eligibility to people who are in receipt of the lower rate of disability living allowance, and that they should do so as a matter of urgency.

Like Shirley-Anne Somerville, I find it amazing that the issue is a matter of urgency for Labour only now that it is in opposition—despite what Jackie Baillie said. After all, it was when the national scheme was introduced by the Labour Party, when it was in a coalition Government with the Liberal Democrats, that many disabled people

lost the entitlement to concessionary fares that they had enjoyed under local authority-run schemes. When those schemes were replaced by the national scheme, people on the low rate of mobility disability living allowance were excluded. That happened under a Labour Government, but it is only now that Labour is in opposition that it considers the issue to be a matter of urgency.

Jackie Baillie suggests that the issue is not a budget matter, but surely it is, given that it seems to be about money. Where were the Labour amendments to the budget that sought to provide additional funds for the concessionary fares budget? It is only now that we are in the middle of the budget process that Labour's concern about additional revenue for this area has emerged. Some people who are less charitable than I am might suggest that that is more an exercise in grandstanding than an expression of genuine concern.

No regard seems to have been paid to the fact that the SNP Government has already moved funds from the underutilised younger persons scheme to fund parts of the concessionary fares scheme that have a high uptake. Is that not to be welcomed? Does the Labour Party prefer baseline figures that bear no relation to need or demand on the ground? Would it prefer moneys to be transferred to end-year flexibility, instead of being utilised to help many of the people for whom its motion expresses concern?

That is to say nothing of the increased funding that the SNP Government will provide in the coming year for the smart card programme to allow the delivery of improved ticketing machinery, which will enable efficiency savings to be made in future as a result of improved validation of bus operator claims. Those areas of investment are welcome and show that the SNP Government wants to improve disabled people's access to public transport. It is right that it demonstrates such concern.

Inclusion Scotland suggests that a

"lack of accessible and affordable transport is a major barrier preventing disabled people living independent lives with access to all the opportunities most non-disabled people take for granted."

Help the Aged says that a lack of access to public transport for older people can lead to

"isolation, social exclusion and a lower quality of life."

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): You have one minute left.

Jamie Hepburn: It is clear that much has been achieved. Let us remember that a million Scots—a fifth of our population—qualify for free travel. I congratulate the previous Executive on the role that it played in that achievement.

However, much remains to be done. The minister mentioned that the SNP Government is to review the national concessionary scheme in due course, when proper consideration can be given to including those people who became disqualified when the national scheme was first introduced. I welcome Stewart Stevenson's announcement that additional support will be provided to bus operators. Those measures, combined with the transfer of moneys to deal with the areas of highest demand for concessionary fares and the investment in our rail and roads infrastructure, show that transport is safe in the hands of the SNP Government.

As I have mentioned rail, it would be remiss of me not to mention that this week members received the final case for crossrail from Strathclyde partnership for transport. I look forward to ministers making a positive response to that case, particularly the option that includes the provision of services from Croy to Barrhead. However, that is for another—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Your time is up, I am afraid.

10:02

John Park (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I am pleased to speak in favour of the motion that was lodged by my Labour colleague Des McNulty. Without doubt, the future of public transport in Scotland is one of the key issues that we face today. It concerns communities, interest groups and individuals.

Since entering Parliament last year, I have had countless pieces of correspondence about public transport developments across Scotland, especially those in my region of Mid Scotland and Fife. A subject of particular interest has been the level of bus services in Fife and Perthshire—there has been huge public interest in how services have developed in those areas. I am often struck by the similarities between the problems that are faced in rural areas and those that are faced in urban areas.

Over the past few months, it has become clear to me that proper engagement by bus operators with passengers and wider communities is vital in building public confidence in services. That is why consistent Government support—particularly financial support—is important to sustaining and developing services in every part of Scotland. As well as being relevant to the communities that it serves and the people who use it, public transport must be affordable.

I am proud that, as has been mentioned, Fife Council led the way in recognising the importance of affordable travel by establishing a concessionary travel scheme, which was

pioneered by the late Bert Gough. In a debate last week, I made it clear that I support the Government's aim of making Scotland wealthier and fairer. Although I do not always agree with the SNP's methods in that area, I agree with the sentiment. In the interest of parity, it is important to state that I also support the Government's aim of making Scotland greener. I do not think that anyone would deny that one of the main ways of ensuring that Scotland becomes greener is to maximise the use of our public transport systems.

That is why I am rather confused by the Scottish Government's budget allocation to the bus service operators grant. It is important that we examine the potential impact of that budget line, especially in a week in which the Government launched its proposed climate change bill. It is clear that there will be no real-terms increase for the bus service operators grant. I must ask what that will mean for people throughout Mid Scotland and Fife. In the longer term, fares will probably increase significantly. Services in rural communities in Perthshire, for example, will come under threat. At a time when we need more people to use public transport, especially buses, we should not cut an important element of Government financial intervention. In many areas, those finances go a long way towards sustaining fledgling routes in both rural and urban communities.

There needs to be a wider debate about how services are regulated and about the level of financial support that they receive from Government—the two issues go hand in hand. Regardless of that wider debate, we cannot lose sight of the fact that, over the past 10 years, private bus operators have invested more than £400 million in new vehicles, as has been mentioned. In Fife alone, 150 new buses have entered the network. That is a significant investment that has improved significantly the bus journey experience for thousands of travellers.

I return to the issue of concessionary travel. We need to look to London for inspiration and to see what Ken Livingstone has achieved with his schemes. Today the Parliament should be discussing how the Government can support public transport effectively to make it more attractive and affordable, especially to the young, old and disabled. We should not be discussing, as we are, how the modal shift that all members support will be undermined by lack of investment. Achieving a long-term shift of our citizens on to public transport, especially buses, requires radical policy, not cuts in funding.

We in Scotland cannot operate in a bubble. There are many factors outwith our control that mean that, in the future, public transport will be not just an option but an economic necessity. Clearly,

this is the time to increase investment in bus travel. I fully support Des McNulty's motion.

10:06

Patrick Harvie: I have been entertained, if nothing else, by the range of facial expressions among Labour members during the debate. At one point there was a wave of puzzlement at the fact that I could apparently support SNP transport policy. There is a simple explanation: I do not. I do not support the SNP's or Labour's transport policies. Greens have been and will be consistent on the issue.

Des McNulty: Is it Green policy to support disabled people?

Patrick Harvie: I am not sure what the member's question is. I will deal with issues relating to eligibility for the scheme later in my speech.

Shirley-Anne Somerville was quite wrong to undervalue the tram scheme. Labour members know fine well that on the increasingly few occasions when they have presented the right arguments in the chamber, we have supported them. That is why the Edinburgh tram scheme will go ahead. They also know that, other than on trams, there is very little to choose between Labour's and the SNP's transport policies. Both parties support more road traffic, more road capacity and more aviation. Under either party, public transport will remain a Cinderella service.

Given the factors that I have described and the parliamentary arithmetic, Greens are determined to use whatever influence they have to achieve changes. We will seek to secure whatever improvements we can get to the SNP's budget and spending plans. That is why the SNP knows that, without making meaningful changes to its budget and to the spending commitments in budget lines, it cannot rely on our votes. The changes that we require include but are not limited to those that I propose in my amendment. Unlike other parties, we will not prejudge issues and will spell out the need for change. We will give ministers reasonable time in which to make change. When we see change, we will make our decisions.

It is unfortunate that the parliamentary dynamics sometimes obscure the fact that every political party that is represented in the Parliament has made points that are well worth making. The Liberal Democrats' comments on the tangible benefits of demand-responsive transport and community transport, which can be nothing short of life changing for some people, are welcome. There is certainly scope for building on existing provision of those services during the current spending review period.

For the Conservatives, Alex Johnstone observed that it is unusual for him to find himself supporting a Green amendment. I hope that he will avail himself of that pleasure more frequently in future. His comments on eligibility for disabled people are welcome.

Many of the comments that we have heard from Labour members are also worth supporting. In many respects, all parties share the same objective. I welcome in particular John Park's comments on the longer-term debate that we should be having, regardless of the debate on the budget. It is a week before we decide whether to pass the budget, so it is understandable that a debate on transport should get tied up in that, but there is a serious need for us to consider the long-term future provision of public transport, including buses, and to decide what the regulatory framework for buses should be. No one would argue that a completely free market is appropriate. Competition and the market have achieved some things but have failed in other respects. We should consider the role that regulation will play in the future, not with a view to rolling back time but in order to achieve a better regulatory framework.

Members from all political parties have made comments that are worth supporting. However, on the key point of the budget, to which many members have referred, we need a clear, strong message. The Green amendment gives that message—I hope that other parties will support it.

10:11

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): I am glad that the chamber has recognised the contribution that the previous Executive made in this area. A million Scots benefited from disabled and elderly access to concessionary travel. When the scheme was rolled out to younger people, a further 200,000 Scots benefited. Like other members, I point out that the scheme was always due to be reviewed.

My colleague Alison McInnes was correct to draw our attention to demand-responsive transport. Last February, responsibility for that was handed over to regional transport partnerships, but now it has been handed back to local authorities, as part of the local government settlement. Let me cut to the chase of the argument, on which we have touched repeatedly during the budget process. On one side, it is argued that ring fencing has been removed from certain parts of the budget. The counter-argument is that funding has been rolled up in the settlement for local authorities. The SNP argues that that is more democratic, because funding has been passed down to a lower level. However, let us pause to consider the budgetary stage that each of our local authorities has reached. We all know that local

authorities have difficult decisions to make. My authority, Highland Council, is faced with a very tight budget. The danger is that demand-responsive transport may lose out in that scenario. That is the point that I am making.

I am interested in and not a little incredulous at the Conservative amendment. The point behind Des McNulty's motion is that what is happening on the other side of the border is not the same as what is about to happen on this side of the border. I put it to members that bus users, be they rich or poor, elderly or disabled, are no respecters of borders. A bus is a bus; concessionary transport is concessionary transport. It is too bad that arrangements may be different on different sides of the border. That should be a difficult scenario for the Conservatives to accept, given that they are the Conservative and Unionist Party. Their amendment to Patrick Harvie's amendment is something of a smokescreen in that regard.

I am glad that Patrick Harvie responded to Shirley-Anne Somerville's remarks. There is no doubt that the tram scheme is hugely popular in Edinburgh and will do a great deal to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. It will also serve people who live far away from Edinburgh and will be a great boon to the disabled. I know from personal experience how difficult it is to access Edinburgh airport from the city centre, so I regret the passing of the Edinburgh airport rail link, which we will come to recognise as a big mistake.

The SNP always starts to dig its elephant traps early. One trap that it has been digging ever since the summer is the claim that the A9 will not be upgraded because we voted for the Edinburgh tram scheme. I have heard the Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change rehearse that argument, but it simply does not wash. The Edinburgh airport rail link, the Edinburgh tram scheme, improvements to the A9 and many other measures were in the budget from the word go. The SNP's argument may seem clever, but the digging is distant. In three and a half years' time, it will not wash.

My colleague Alison McInnes's amendment is entirely correct. I support her amendment and the Labour motion.

10:14

Gavin Brown (Lothians) (Con): I am happy to begin by acknowledging the efforts of the previous Executive—both the Labour Party and the Liberal Democrats—in implementing the national concessionary travel scheme. Members from all parties agree that the scheme has been a big success.

Before moving on, I want to respond to a number of points that have been made. Labour

members have argued that the issues that they raise in their motion are not budget issues. Although I accept Jackie Baillie's point that the issue about lower rate DLA claimants is not a budget matter, the major part of the Labour motion is about the budget. There is a budget line entitled "Concessionary Fares" on page 88 of the spending review document and on page 92, the budget line "Bus Services in Scotland" is concerned with the bus service operators grant. There were no amendments from the Labour Party during the budget process in relation to either of those lines.

Charlie Gordon (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab): Will the member give way?

Gavin Brown: Perhaps in a minute, but not now. That was despite the fact that Labour wanted to raid the transport budget for over £90 million from three separate lines.

I take issue with Jackie Baillie's comments that the Conservatives and the Greens do not support the idea of reviewing the scheme to include those on the lower rate of the disability living allowance. Patrick Harvie's amendment, which I am not sure that Jackie Baillie and Des McNulty have read, says clearly that it is the

"Government's intention to review the national concessionary travel scheme"

and calls on ministers to ensure that they maximise the benefits of public transport during that review.

Jackie Baillie: I am sure that the *Official Report* will show that Alex Johnstone said that he wanted to include those on the lower rate of disability allowance in the scheme, not simply that he wanted a review.

Gavin Brown: I am not quite sure what point the member is making, but we feel strongly that the scheme needs to be reviewed to include people on the lower rate of the disability living allowance needs. I do not accept for a second Jackie Baillie's comments that members did not realise when they passed the Transport (Scotland) Act 2005 that people on the lower rate of the disability living allowance would lose out—despite the fact that when any legislation is passed we have to look at various audits, including one that relates to equalities. It stretches credibility to the extreme for Jackie Baillie to suggest that members did not realise that those people would lose out, particularly when passengers in Strathclyde already had that right. Did members not compare the Strathclyde passengers' rights with those that they proposed to give other passengers in the future?

Shirley-Anne Somerville spoke about trams. The critical point about that is that the SNP's

Edinburgh airport rail link project depends entirely on there being a tram network. It is utterly disingenuous of Shirley-Anne Somerville or any SNP member to criticise the tram network when their rail network depends on it. They might wish to reflect on that before putting out press releases.

The bus service operators grant needs to be looked at urgently. There is a £57.2 million budget line for it this year but, worryingly, there is also a £57.2 million budget line for it next year and the year after that. That is a large, real-terms cut.

Des McNulty: So why do the Conservatives support the budget?

Gavin Brown: Mr McNulty might wish to reflect that the tax increases of 2p that we had in October and the 2p that we will have in April are down to the Labour Party Government at Westminster, about which he was coy in his speech. Fuel prices have increased massively; we have had one tax increase of 2p and another is to come. Annabel Goldie and my colleague Alex Johnstone have both led on the issue at First Minister's question time and at other times in the chamber; the bus service operators grant must be increased as soon as possible.

10:18

Stewart Stevenson: I will follow Ian McKee's example and explain that my 55 journeys were paid for by the national concessionary travel scheme. In fact, I have looked at my travel diary more closely and, when I add all my public transport and walking journeys in excess of 10 minutes, I am pleased to say that 53.9 per cent of my journeys since May fall into that category. The minister does not just talk the talk, he walks the walk as well—and thoroughly enjoys doing so for the benefit of his health as well as the climate.

I will say a couple of words about the current bus service operators grant. The key point is that it has been a direct subsidy for fuel. I am particularly encouraged by the engagement and attitude of the Confederation of Passenger Transport UK and the major bus operators.

Brian Adam (Aberdeen North) (SNP): Is the minister aware of a scheme that is currently being introduced by Lothian Buses, in conjunction with a Bellshill company called Solution Specialists Limited, to reduce the amount of diesel spillage from buses and allow active monitoring of the use of fuel, thereby increasing efficiency? Will the minister consider using such a scheme as part of the BSOG conditions?

Stewart Stevenson: The member makes an interesting and key environmental point—he makes my point for me. We want to use the BSOG to reward environmentally friendly changes in

behaviour. I am pleased that we have engagement on the subject.

We have thought about concessionary travel; I have announced changes for epileptics. We are also looking at the broader issue of administration and at the application form, to ensure that we are not denying anyone access to the concessionary travel scheme simply by administrative means.

Jamie Stone: Does the minister accept that, despite the best intentions of his Government and those of his predecessors, access to public transport for disabled people is patchy? That is a problem in my constituency, for reasons to do with the operators that we do not quite understand. Will he look at that, please?

Stewart Stevenson: Indeed. Although I welcome the new provision for wheelchairs that I have seen in many buses, there continues to be a problem in rural areas and I recognise that we need to look at that.

The bottom line is that we will start the review this year. We will look at the concessionary travel scheme in a wide range of ways. We are picking up administrative issues as far as we can—

Charlie Gordon: Will the minister give way?

Stewart Stevenson: I am sorry, but I no longer have time.

The bus route development fund was mentioned. It still exists and is the responsibility of local councils. That leads me to demand-responsive transport and some of the bizarre comments made by the Liberal speaker, Ms McInnes, who opened for her party today. When she was chair of NESTRANS, she wrote to the Government to plead that local authorities be allowed to retain responsibility for demand-responsive transport. Indeed, her council, when she was a member of it, introduced the very successful A2B scheme that operates in rural Aberdeenshire. That illustrates perfectly that local government is the best place to consider and make decisions on provision of the right local demand-responsive services. When I promoted my debate, I did not know that several community services qualified for the BSOG and to carry passengers who have the concessionary travel card. Such community services only have to be registered as publicly accessible services.

I do not disagree emotionally with what the Labour Party says. Broadly speaking, there is unanimity that public transport services are important and that we must support them. I have heard others make the point—more adequately than I might—that much of what the Labour Party criticises it had the opportunity to fix. Indeed, when Jackie Baillie said that she didnae ken, she only begged the question whether she is culpable or

incompetent. Sometimes, it is better to be thought a fool than to open one's mouth and show that one is a fool. I am happy to have participated in this debate.

10:23

Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab): Well, well, well. At least our coalition was public and transparent. The coalition that is developing in this chamber has all the worst traits of smoke-filled rooms. Our benches have consigned such traits—like compositing at Labour conferences—to the distant past.

A distinctly green thread is being woven into the new nationalist-Tory tartan. That tartan is based on the needs of big business, the wealthy and those who can shout loudest. It fails the poor, the disabled and the disadvantaged. We hear a broken record from the nationalists—if they have to make a hard decision, it is all because of the big, bad boy in number 11 Downing Street or it becomes the responsibility of local government. Government is about making hard decisions and being accountable for them. We on the Labour benches give the Government notice: when local authorities in Scotland have to start making difficult decisions and cuts, we will know where the blame lies. It will lie at the heart of the SNP Government, which has failed to provide the necessary support.

Stewart Stevenson *rose—*

Karen Gillon: Sit down, minister; you have had more than enough time.

The SNP Government has failed to provide the necessary support not only for transport, which will mean cuts in demand-led services, but for a range of other services, which will mean that disabled young people will not receive the same respite services as those throughout the rest of the United Kingdom.

What about the fact that the bus service operators grant will be frozen, not increased? What a commitment that is to public transport, Patrick. Someone, somewhere will have to pay. Indeed, the options are clear. Will there have to be cuts in the routes to some of our most vulnerable rural and urban communities? Will fare-paying passengers have to pay more? Will there be a squeeze on the pay, terms and conditions of the very staff who deliver the services that we all require?

Patrick Harvie: Like her colleague Mr McNulty, the member has criticised other members for supporting a freeze in the bus service operators grant, despite the fact that the amendments call very explicitly for the grant to be substantially increased. Has she actually read the amendments?

Karen Gillon: Yes, I have your amendment, Patrick. However, it does one other very important thing—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Excuse me. I ask the member not to use first names or the second person.

Karen Gillon: I am sorry. Mr Harvie's amendment seeks to delete from the motion the important issue of disabled access to public transport, which is worthy of serious debate in the chamber and should not be subject to the rigid political dogma of, for example, Jamie Hepburn.

Given that the vast majority of people on the lower rate of the disability living allowance are already budgeted for in the roll-out of the current scheme, arguing about the budget is the Government using smoke and mirrors to hide its failure to close the loophole. No member on the Labour benches—or, I am sure, in the rest of the chamber—opposes a review of the scheme to find out whether any improvements can be made. However, that does not stop the minister acting now—not at some point in the future—to ensure that those on the lower rate of the disability living allowance can continue to access the concessionary fares scheme.

In my constituency, a local group that provides befriending services to adults with learning disabilities has been awarded £250,000 support. To develop the confidence of adults with learning difficulties, befrienders engage with and support them by, for example, taking them out on visits. I have no doubt that the range of these activities will be severely limited if the minister does not act now to close the loophole. I believe that he wants to act in Scotland's best interests, but he cannot keep abdicating his responsibilities. Even if he cannot bring himself to support Des McNulty's amendment, he has the opportunity to act, to close the loophole and make the same changes for these people that he has made for people with epilepsy. I hope that, even at this late stage, the minister will consider the matter further and perhaps come back to the chamber with his thoughts at an early opportunity.

The Green amendment would also delete from our amendment the issue of access to rural community transport. In constituencies such as mine, commercial bus operators do not offer services to large number of communities because it is simply not an option for them. Given that community transport provides a joined-up public transport network, it should form part of the process and part of the concessionary fares scheme. As the Tory amendment states, community transport was not included in the scheme when it was introduced. However, we can learn from the experience and improve and develop the scheme. Indeed, rural community

transport could be an invaluable part of the public transport network if it were able to access it. The vast majority of those who use such transport are the elderly, the disabled and those who cannot easily access cars to get to bigger settlements and are therefore stuck in their homes.

I hope that the minister will be able to reflect on those points and make those changes ahead of his review. The people affected, particularly those on lower rate DLA, deserve nothing less from this Parliament.

Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I seek clarification on the guidance that you gave to Karen Gillon on the use of names in the chamber. According to the Presiding Officers' previous guidance, which is meant to ensure that those listening to the debate are not confused, it is wrong to use someone's first name initially and, to begin with, members should use an individual's full name. The previous advice does not say that there is anything wrong with using a member's first name once the individual has been identified. We all know that Patrick Harvie's name is Patrick.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Indeed it is. However, for the sake of simplicity and so that we do not have to keep track of when someone's full name has been mentioned to see whether subsequent mentions are in order, we will stick with the ruling that one should either use the member's full name—in this case, Patrick Harvie—or call the member Mr Harvie. That is the Presiding Officer's ruling and my ruling. Now let us get on with the next debate.

School Buildings

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): The next item of business is a debate on motion S3M-1258, in the name of Rhona Brankin, on education.

10:30

Rhona Brankin (Midlothian) (Lab): I am pleased to open this debate on the school building programme. Having taught in a variety of schools in the 1970s and 1980s, I have practical experience of this subject.

As we know, school buildings are hugely important to the learning process. As everyone will agree, they should be windproof and watertight and provide reasonable comfort. Beyond that, the concentration and performance of staff and pupils alike can be affected by factors such as ventilation, lighting, temperature, the design of teaching and learning spaces and the green spaces around the school.

In reports published in 2001 and 2003 on the impact of capital investment in schools, PricewaterhouseCoopers found that new and refurbished buildings had a significant positive effect on staff and pupil motivation and behaviour. More important, the key finding of the 2003 study is that there is a positive and statistically significant association between capital investment and pupil performance. Put simply, better school buildings get better results.

Labour has long recognised that correlation. In the first parliamentary session, we built or substantially refurbished 123 schools and, in the second, we added another 205 schools to the list, giving a total of 328 new or substantially refurbished schools. That was the biggest school building programme ever undertaken in Scotland.

Moreover, our school buildings are getting better: 62 per cent of them have been rated good or satisfactory, compared with 57 per cent two years ago, while over the same period the proportion of school buildings rated bad fell from 8 per cent to 5 per cent.

Of course, we were not complacent. Indeed, how could we be when that seemingly small 5 per cent meant that pupils in 108 primary schools, 15 special schools and 14 secondary schools were learning in buildings that were found not only to have major defects but to be beyond the end of their economic life? There was absolutely no room for complacency. Labour committed to building 250 new or refurbished schools in this session, with 100 completed by 2009.

As we know, the SNP manifesto says:

"We will match the current school building programme brick for brick",

and I would be grateful if the minister would be so kind as to reiterate that promise in the chamber this morning. If that promise is to be kept, some serious progress will need to be made to complete the first 100 schools by 2009.

Alex Salmond has also promised that class sizes in primary 1 to primary 3 will be reduced to 18 by 2011. I wonder whether the SNP has any information yet on the capital costs involved in such a move, because it did not the last time that I asked the question. The SNP also rashly promised to match Labour's school building programme without having any idea of how that would be achieved.

The Minister for Children and Early Years (Adam Ingram): If Labour had been fortunate enough to get back into power, how much would its manifesto pledge on schools have cost the taxpayer? Indeed, what resources in the current budget would the member use to redeem that pledge?

Rhona Brankin: We fully costed that commitment when we were in government. We are waiting today to hear exactly what the SNP will do. We have heard nothing—the SNP has not told us about one brass farthing that it will spend on the school building programme. Frankly, that is an outrage.

In Midlothian alone, which is one of the smallest local authority areas in the country, public-private partnership schemes have boosted spending on school buildings by £72 million, but the SNP has casually dismissed such schemes on ideological grounds. Such is the SNP's hypocrisy that SNP members who spent eight years in opposition denigrating PPP schemes and the schools that were built or refurbished through them are now falling over themselves to pose for the cameras in front of new schools that were financed by PPP schemes and which are still being opened. Frankly, it is disgusting. Nor will the crumbs that have been thrown to local authorities from John Swinney's budget table make much of an impact on Scotland's school estate. Councillors grow increasingly frustrated every time that they are told of an additional responsibility that must be funded from their small but much-trumpeted increase in funding, which has already been spent more times than the SNP's elastic penny for Scotland was spent.

Can we be confident that the SNP's Scottish futures trust will see our school estate okay? I doubt it, because the current consultation on the SFT is nothing more than an exercise in buying time for SNP ministers as they try to make their shambles of an infrastructure policy work. Many

issues arise about the Scottish futures trust, but I will confine myself to three questions, to which I would like an answer. Will the Minister for Schools and Skills confirm that the Scottish futures trust would give no role whatever to communities, local authorities or health boards in the commissioning, design or management of projects? Can she confirm that, under the SNP's proposals, no new school buildings would belong to local authorities at the end of the 30-year contracts? Will the minister confirm today how many schools will be built using the model?

What does the minister have to say to the parents, pupils and staff at Lasswade high school centre in my constituency, which is in a shocking state? It is not fit for purpose and £35 million is required for a new school. That is part of a requirement for more than £100 million for the Midlothian school estate, despite the substantial investment that has already taken place. Council hands are tied, however, while the SNP dithers. In Portobello, Dumbarton, Viewforth in Kirkcaldy, Portlethen in Aberdeenshire and throughout the country, parents, pupils and teachers want to know when they will get their new schools. They deserve answers. The previous Government put Lasswade high school centre on a list of six schools that had top priority for refurbishment, but the present Government has gone back on that promise.

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning has evaded the questions long enough. She must make a long-overdue statement to Parliament to set out the Scottish Government's school building programme—she owes it to Scotland's children and their parents to do so. I ask members to support the motion in my name.

I move,

That the Parliament recognises the importance of high-quality school buildings to young people's learning; notes the SNP's commitment to match the previous administration's school building programme "brick for brick"; further notes that the previous administration built 200 schools between 2003 and 2007; condemns the Scottish Executive for its total failure to publish details of its school building programme, and calls on the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning to make a statement to the Parliament detailing the Executive's plans for building the new schools that Scotland's children deserve and that the SNP promised in its 2007 manifesto.

10:38

Elizabeth Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): As I think we agreed yesterday, first and foremost, the quality of the teaching profession is what matters in education. However, as Rhona Brankin said, the school estate plays a large part in determining an environment that is conducive to learning and which fosters good discipline and a sense of pride in the community. Just look at the

positive responses this week in Dumfries and Galloway and Perth and Kinross as new school buildings have opened or embarked on the first stage of the construction process. An attractive, clean, well-heated and spacious building plus an attractive, eco-friendly and energy-efficient campus can do a huge amount not only to boost the performance of a school, but to instil a sense of pride and common purpose. Therefore, it is only right that the building and maintenance of the school estate is a priority.

Schools these days are used increasingly by pupils and teachers and by members of the local community. That is greatly to be encouraged, but it brings added pressures and costs. It is therefore extremely important that we take into account the diverse uses and the multipurpose nature of schools as we debate the appropriate use of resources and finance. We want our schools to be well built, to make efficient use of scarce resources and to provide best value for money. Those issues should be matters of economics and social welfare, not political dogma. The decision on which route to take to satisfy the criteria should be made on a project-by-project basis, as there is no one right way in which to build a school, nor is there always only one appropriate source of finance. So, in our view, quality outcomes demand flexibility in the system.

In that respect, the Conservatives are proud to have devised the private finance initiative. Together with the public-private partnerships that were constructed by the Labour and Liberal Executive, the PFI has met the urgent need for the construction of school and other public buildings, which capital grants from the Government or traditional prudential borrowing by local authorities could not have done. Another substantial benefit of PPP/PFI has been the transfer of the risk of maintaining schools to the contractor, thereby leaving local authorities to concentrate on the vital task of providing education services, rather than being preoccupied with bricks and mortar. Local authorities have become increasingly used to the system and are now far better placed to avoid any mishandled tendering and the consequent unnecessary costs that occurred with some projects in the past.

For some projects, up-front financing from capital or conventional borrowing might be a better option than a PPP or PFI scheme. The SNP has made much of its Scottish futures trust as a preferred finance option. We would not rule out a version of that, if the aim was to increase flexibility in the system so that the much-needed rebuilding or refurbishment of individual schools can take place without the need to wait for a uniform scheme to be put in place to redevelop a whole local authority school estate in one phase. However, it is incumbent on the SNP to come to

the Parliament urgently with a full statement to provide the details of its proposal, because the current signals reflect confusion and indecision.

Before the election, the SNP seemed to suggest that the Scottish futures trust would mirror the American-style trusts, in which investors can invest in public infrastructure bonds on a not-for-profit basis. However, following the election, perhaps—just perhaps—as a result of the warnings of economists and legal experts that there could be complications in relation to tax liability and the operation of the policy in relation to the Scotland Act 1998, the proposals seem to have been watered down considerably. Any delay in making such a statement to Parliament would, by definition, mean more uncertainty and confusion, especially for those who want the go-ahead to build new schools.

Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab): I am curious to know whether the reason why the member may be inclined to support the Scottish futures trust is that it would involve not public sector ownership but, in effect, private finance.

Elizabeth Smith: Not at all. The reason is that we are asking for flexibility. There is not one right way of building a school or of financing that. The more flexibility that we have in the system, the better.

We need to know whether the Government is committed to matching the school building programme brick for brick, as Labour asked, and we need to know what financial arrangements the Government intends to put in place. It is also essential that we have an assurance that the Scottish futures trust would be fully transparent, in that it would attract investment at the market rate and provide the ability to offer separate bonds for separate projects. In the Scottish Conservatives' view, it would be totally unacceptable for the Government to try to meddle in those matters. As Iain McMillan of the Confederation of British Industry Scotland has argued, it is essential that we have a good mix and that the private sector can play a full part in providing much-needed resources.

As I said, it is vital that the quality of the school estate in Scotland matches the aspirations that we have for our young people. Absolutely no time should be wasted in setting out the detailed plans for developing the estate so that the incentive to deliver high-quality services is firmly put in place. I call on the Government to provide answers this morning to the key questions in the debate.

I move amendment S3M-1258.1, to leave out from “; notes the SNP’s commitment” to end and insert:

“and the need for energy efficiency, quality design including the incorporation of sound ecological and sustainable design principles, and value for money for the public purse in building schools; recognises the need for the Scottish Government and local authorities to continue to improve Scotland’s school estate; notes the SNP’s commitment to match the previous administration’s proposed school building programme ‘brick for brick’, and calls on the Scottish Government to make a statement to the Parliament detailing its plans for new schools and how these will be funded.”

10:43

The Minister for Schools and Skills (Maureen Watt): As the Parliament knows, the SNP Government has a manifesto commitment to match the previous Executive’s school building programme brick for brick. We are doing that. We have signed off seven school projects, including PPP projects in East Dunbartonshire Council, West Lothian Council, Perth and Kinross Council, Dumfries and Galloway Council and, most recently, West Dunbartonshire Council, as well as projects involving non-profit-distributing organisations in Falkirk Council and Aberdeen City Council.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): Will the minister take an intervention?

Maureen Watt: I will not, as I have only four minutes.

Those projects will deliver 45 new and refurbished schools in eight months. We will also support the remaining four projects that are at various stages. PPP schemes are a costly way in which to provide public infrastructure, but we took a pragmatic approach to allow those projects to continue, rather than disadvantage the children, young people and communities whose expectations had been raised.

Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): Will the minister give way?

Maureen Watt: I ask the member to let me finish this point.

Labour had no plans in train for any further projects. The initial working up of plans takes at least a year in local authorities. Negotiations take at least 18 months, and a school takes 18 months to build. There is no evidence that any of that work was going on under the previous Executive so that the work could have been continued had that Executive been returned to power.

Ken Macintosh *rose*—

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

Maureen Watt: I will give way.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: To whom?

Maureen Watt: Mike Rumbles.

Mike Rumbles: If what the minister said was the case, why is it that in our local authority area of Aberdeenshire, a £200 million bid has been prepared for the next spending round? The work has already been done.

Maureen Watt: Aberdeenshire Council has been asked to submit any plans that it has. We have not seen them yet.

Rhona Brankin: Will the minister take an intervention?

Maureen Watt: No thank you—I have only four minutes.

We have provided an extra £40 million of capital funds for the 2007-08 period, to help towards the introduction of measures related to our commitments on class sizes.

Mary Mulligan (Linlithgow) (Lab): Will the minister give way?

Maureen Watt: No thank you.

Our budgets will deliver record investment in Scotland’s future and investment in growing opportunity and prosperity for our nation.

George Foulkes (Lothians) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I ask you to give extra time to the minister so that she can answer questions from individual MSPs who have constituency concerns. She is clearly not telling the truth. We want to challenge—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order. I ask the member to withdraw that remark.

George Foulkes: As far as I am concerned, it appears that she is not telling the truth.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I ask Lord Foulkes to withdraw that remark.

George Foulkes: If you ask, I will withdraw it, but I can tell you, in relation—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you. In your point of order you seemed to ask for a rather flexible extension of the minister’s time because you wanted her to answer every possible question. Minister, I will give you another two minutes, from now.

Maureen Watt: Thank you, Presiding Officer. I know that every member in the chamber could stand up and ask about particular issues in their areas, but they can raise those issues through parliamentary questions and they will get an answer.

As I was saying, our budgets will deliver record investment in Scotland’s future, and will deliver investment in growing opportunity and prosperity for our nation. We are committed to improving the

learning experience of children and young people by improving the fabric of schools. We have a new and constructive relationship with local government in Scotland—one that gives greater flexibility and responsibility to local authorities to allow them to deliver their local priorities while working with us to deliver our shared and agreed commitments.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You have one more minute.

Maureen Watt: We have reduced ring fencing of funds, bureaucracy and monitoring. There is an extra £115 million of capital for local authorities in 2008-09, and around £3 billion over three years is being provided to secure investment in local government infrastructure, including schools.

Many local authorities—including North Lanarkshire Council, South Lanarkshire Council and Glasgow City Council—are embarking on modernisation programmes or are in the process of doing so.

Rhona Brankin: Will the minister give way?

Maureen Watt: The Presiding Officer has said that I am in my final minute.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The minister is just winding up.

Maureen Watt: All in all, significant work is going on as part of the school building programme. Local authorities are working by themselves and for themselves, using resources provided by this Government.

As everyone knows, we have launched a consultation paper on the Scottish futures trust. We want our schools to contribute to the delivery of this Government's strategic objectives. We want low-carbon and sustainable schools.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The minister should conclude now.

Maureen Watt: I will. We care that schools should be of high quality, and—Ms Brankin should listen to this—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: No.

Maureen Watt: We care that we should have schools in which pupils and communities have a say. We will continue to work with bodies such as Architecture and Design Scotland—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The minister must conclude.

Amendment S3M-1258.1.1 moved:

"insert at end 'and further notes that future plans for school buildings will be usefully informed by the imminent publication of Audit Scotland's report on improving the Scottish school estate and the Scottish Government's proposals for the Scottish Futures Trust and the Infrastructure Investment Plan.'"—[Maureen Watt.]

10:49

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): On 26 October 2006, on "Question Time" on the BBC, Nicola Sturgeon was asked this question by Kieran Chambers from Clydebank:

"If I vote your party into power next May will you promise to immediately stop all PPP funding for schools in Scotland?"

Nicola Sturgeon's answer was, "Yes." However, on 27 June 2007, at the Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee, I put it to the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning that it would be

"possible under this Government for councils to put forward new PPP schemes."

Fiona Hyslop replied:

"Yes, but I do not think that it is a big issue."—[*Official Report, Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee, 27 June 2007; c 40.*]

Today, the Minister for Schools and Skills seems not to be supping with the PPP devil but offering it course upon course with alacrity. I am not sure that Scottish National Party back benchers are comfortable with that.

Again we have heard about the £40 million for investment in schools. The minister said that that was for measures on class sizes, but we all now know that the guidance that came with the money was that it should be invested in sports facilities.

The Labour Party should be commended for bringing this topical and focused debate to Parliament. It is apt that we should discuss school buildings this morning. Liberal Democrats have always considered innovative ways of delivering public sector estate improvements. In my local authority area in the Borders, and in Penicuik and Midlothian, three new, state-of-the-art secondary schools and four new primary schools are being built. The primary schools are being built using traditional capital; the secondary schools using PPP.

The process has not been easy. My mailbag has been full of letters about planning issues, design and usage issues, and the ability of the council to design appropriate facilities. There has been great concern about cost overruns and delays to the build programme. Some concern has also been expressed to me about the construction of the PPP school. That highlights the fact that no perfect way exists of building and procuring public buildings in the school estate. In my experience, more concerns are expressed about the traditional route than the PPP route. We have always sought the best approach depending on local circumstances, whether that is traditional capital build, prudential borrowing or PPP. In that regard,

our position is very similar to that of the Conservatives.

I remember many question times during the previous session of Parliament at which John Swinney and I repeatedly raised issues concerning the installation of renewables technologies in schools built by PPP. John Swinney's questions related to the Perth and Kinross Council area, and mine related to the Scottish Borders Council area. In the Borders, the council simply made it part of the bidding process contract that biomass fuel had to be used. That was agreed without any controversy. It was a straightforward part of the process. We have learned about such things as PPP has developed.

Today, we have to consider two aspects of the SNP's Scottish futures trust approach. We have to ask whether it represents private investment or not and whether there will be delays.

Consultation on the Scottish futures trust ends on 14 March. However, the Government was not content to wait until it had heard from consultees, so interviews took place on 8 January for external private sector advisers to develop a business case for the futures trust. The Government says that the business case will be ready by the end of March. The delivery group includes private sector advisers, Government officials and Partnerships UK, which is a PPP body. The involvement of Partnerships UK should surprise Linda Fabiani and Michael Matheson, who campaigned against it during the previous session of Parliament. However, the Government is not content with merely involving Partnerships UK; it has actually included it in the delivery group.

Of course private investment will go into the futures trust. The Government has said that it will not have an uncapped commercial rate for return on the investment, whatever that means. Councils do not know.

At a recent meeting between officials from the Scottish Government—or were they from Partnerships UK?—and local government finance directors, the Government confirmed that there would be no level-playing-field support and no revenue support for any capital new build for schools in Scotland. There was a pause around the room. The reality is that there is no new support from the Scottish Government to invest in our school estate. Without revenue support and level-playing-field support, the policies will certainly not be met. Unfortunately, confusion and delay are the hallmarks of the approach. The situation will have to be rectified urgently.

I move amendment S3M-1258.2, to insert at end:

"recognises the publication of the Scottish Government's consultation on the Scottish Futures Trust and its support

for the use of private finance, and is concerned that the failure of the SNP government to bring forward an alternative funding mechanism and support is causing confusion and uncertainty and is holding back councils across Scotland who want to improve schools in their areas."

10:53

Cathy Jamieson (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab): We have already heard this morning that Labour has a good record on building schools. I make no apology for following a similar line to Rhona Brankin. I remind the chamber that, between 1999 and 2007, more than £11 million was invested in the school estate in the South Ayrshire Council area. New schools are under construction in Alloway and Ayr. In the East Ayrshire Council area, a number of schools have undergone major refurbishment. There have also been new builds. One of the ministers responsible for education had the opportunity to open one of those new schools last week.

We always knew that more work had to be done, which is why Labour had a clear plan for school building. That contrasts with the SNP position. The SNP has broken its pledge to match our programme brick for brick. Its programme is more about closing schools than building new ones. I say that with a degree of sorrow, because I would rather not have to make this particular speech.

The SNP has made much of its commitment to a presumption against the closure of small rural schools, but those words—like the pledge to match our programme brick for brick—do not appear to be translating into any action. The SNP-led council in my area proposes to close four small rural schools that serve my constituents. I would rather that those four schools were maintained, improved or rebuilt. That is the kind of creative approach that members around the chamber should take.

The SNP's futures trust is not finalised, as we have heard again this morning. It is not so much a futures trust as another breach of trust by the SNP. I was prepared to examine the proposals and weigh them up, so I recently asked the minister a parliamentary question about how local authorities can gain the funds to make the necessary capital investment—she invited us to submit parliamentary questions and I did exactly that. In her reply, she specifically suggested that the sources could include:

"contributions from developers, capital receipts from the disposal of assets, or extra monies raised through self-financed borrowing."—[Official Report, Written Answers, 18 January 2008; S3W-7999.]

How many schools does she expect to be funded by contributions from developers and in what circumstances? Has she told the local authorities

that she expects them to sell off their assets? Will she tell us which assets those are? Are they the sites that some existing small rural schools sit on, sites that have been earmarked for social housing or open spaces in our communities? Exactly which parts of the family silver are the local authorities to sell off? If she cannot tell me that today, will she at least answer the question that Rhona Brankin asked: how many schools will she and her Government commit to build by 2011 and how many will her Government commit to refurbish by 2011?

If the minister agrees that local democracy is important, will she tell me whether it is correct that the decision on the four threatened rural schools in East Ayrshire will be taken not by the whole council, which would give every councillor the opportunity to represent their constituents, but by the council's SNP cabinet? Will she step in, talk to her colleagues in East Ayrshire and reverse the decision? Will she follow the example of my colleagues in Westminster by making it clear that there is a presumption against closing rural schools and intervening to ensure that not one rural school closure is pushed through before the legislation that she promised on the issue is introduced? If she cannot give those commitments today, the SNP has failed on every challenge that it has been set.

10:57

Christina McKelvie (Central Scotland) (SNP): Yesterday, we had a debate on the importance of history in our schools, so I will begin with a short history of our schools—just the recent history, of course.

In the Labour Party manifesto of 1997 there is one line—just one—about school buildings. It reads:

“Public/private partnerships will improve the condition of school buildings.”

Let us have a look at how that panned out. In 2003, leading Scottish architects claimed that PPP/PFI had not improved the condition of school buildings as Labour had claimed it would. Sebastian Tombs said that there was too little emphasis on whether the schools that were being provided offered the best learning environment. Bruce Brebner of Anderson Bell and Christie went further, and said:

“The whole thing is driven by money and driven by time ... the process is flawed because the bulk delivery model is a blunt instrument.”

George Foulkes *rose—*

Cathy Jamieson: Will Christina McKelvie give way on that point?

Christina McKelvie: No thank you.

By February of last year, Malcolm Fraser was saying,

“these schools are catastrophically poor”,

the Educational Institute of Scotland was voicing serious reservations about PPP, and the effect on extracurricular activities was devastating.

Rhona Brankin: Will Christina McKelvie give way?

Christina McKelvie: I will not take any interventions, because I will not take lessons from the Labour Party on the matter.

Rhona Brankin: Will Christina McKelvie give way?

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): Ms Brankin, sit down please.

Christina McKelvie: We know of sports clubs not being able to afford the fees to use PPP/PFI schools. One hockey team from Falkirk travelled to Bathgate to play because that was cheaper than booking into the school that it had always used.

Mary Mulligan: Will Christina McKelvie give way?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member is not taking interventions.

Christina McKelvie: We can be fairly certain that PPP/PFI has not exactly improved the condition of school buildings. Moreover, in 2002, Audit Scotland found that it was 4 per cent more expensive than traditional procurement and limited councils' future options. It is shameful that any politician would allow that.

Labour keeps claiming that it built a school a week. Apparently, that level of work from the builders was not enough, so Jackie Baillie told us in March last year that she would set out to build a school every five days. Such industry from the member for Dumbarton! However, she was determined to have the weekends off.

Of course, the truth is that 173 schools were built between 1999 and 2007—not made fit for purpose, but built. However, although 173 were built, 177 were closed during the same period, so when Labour was turfed out of office last May, Scotland had fewer schools than when it came into office. That is some record—it is almost criminal. We are four schools down on the deal and Scottish councils are in hock to the tune of 11.25 per cent. Labour has imposed some tuition fee on the children of Scotland. They will pay back the costs of their primary school education for half their working lives.

Labour's record is simple—shoddy government and expediency—and its solution since May has been to pretend that it never happened. With a wave of the new Labour wand, history is rewritten,

the demons are airbrushed out of the photograph and new heroes are installed in the pantheon.

It is a blessed relief that there was a change of Government last May. Instead of following Labour's school closure programme, local authorities are now free to determine the most appropriate routes for providing the schools that Scotland's children need. We now have a Government that is dedicated to building a decent future for Scotland, wants to improve Scotland's schools and will not leave pupils paying the debt for the rest of their lives.

We have had a decade of Labour failure. Now it is time to deliver. We have looked at the history. Now we have a chance to look to the future.

11:01

Lewis Macdonald (Aberdeen Central) (Lab): The SNP said last year:

"We will match the current school-building programme brick for brick".

It also promised to deliver a maximum class size of 18 in primaries 1 to 3, and on 5 November last year, in reply to a parliamentary question from Richard Baker, Maureen Watt said that ministers

"entirely endorse the views of the Accounts Commission and Audit Scotland ... that an occupancy level of below 60% should not automatically trigger consideration of a school's closure."—[*Official Report, Written Answers*, 5 November 2007; S3W-5300.]

How hollow those words sound to parents in Aberdeen this week. Aberdeen City Council's school building programme has yet to start but, when it does, the new schools—such as the replacement for Mile-End primary school in my constituency—will no longer allow for out-of-zone placements but will be built to a specification that assumes that no out-of-zone pupils will attend through the exercise of parental choice. That approach has been taken only since the SNP joined the city council administration in May and it threatens to deny parents and children their statutory rights.

Last year, SNP education convener Kirsty West and her colleagues launched a review of Aberdeen's school estate. Aberdeen has an average class size of 24 in primaries 1 to 3. That means reducing class sizes by 25 per cent to meet Government targets of a maximum class size of 18. A good reason to review the school estate would be to identify where all the new, smaller classes might be accommodated and what new schools should be built, but that was not the purpose at all. Instead, the review explicitly set out to find ways of reducing the school estate, and the trigger for consideration of a possible school closure was just what Maureen Watt said it should not be:

"an occupancy level of below 60%".

Perhaps SNP ministers should tell SNP councillors in Aberdeen why that is the wrong approach. Perhaps they should tell parents of children at Causewayend school in my constituency about matching Labour's school building programme brick for brick. Instead of doing that, SNP councillors in Aberdeen have drawn up a school closure programme and a hit list of primaries and nurseries across the city.

Causewayend school is top of that list, and yesterday, parents at the school formed a parents council as a first step in their campaign against closure. The chair of that parents council attended Causewayend school as a boy. He still lives on the next street and has one child in primary school and one in nursery at Causewayend. He does not see how smaller class sizes can be achieved by closing schools such as Causewayend, which has served city-centre residents well for the past 132 years.

The SNP's school closure programme in Aberdeen does not stop there. Hilton nursery school, which is bursting at the seams and has been the nursery school of choice for generations of families in a relatively disadvantaged area, is threatened with closure. One of two primary schools that serve the regeneration area of Tillydrone—St Machar school and Donbank school—is threatened with closure, just as plans go forward for hundreds of new affordable homes in the area. Outstanding Catholic primary schools in my constituency, such as St Peter's and St Joseph's, face the threat of rationalisation just a few years down the line. That is the reality that Scotland's schools face under the SNP.

It is simply not acceptable for SNP ministers to say that these are local issues and are therefore not a matter for them. SNP ministers and councillors were elected on a manifesto commitment to deliver smaller class sizes and a promise to build and refurbish schools in order to achieve that. When SNP councillors propose school closures and amalgamations, they are breaking those promises. SNP ministers should own up and be big enough to take their share of the blame.

11:05

Stuart McMillan (West of Scotland) (SNP): We have heard much this morning about how life would be wonderful under a Labour Administration in Scotland and how only the Labour Party would ensure that a school building programme continued to aid pupils in Scottish schools. However, two Labour MSPs think that a new school has been built every week since 1999, which would add up to 416 schools; one thinks

that 200 have been built since 2003; and another thinks that 300 have been built since 1999. In fact, only 110 schools were built in the past four years; 173 were built over the past eight years.

Ken Macintosh: Exactly how many schools can the new SNP Administration take credit for? How many has it commissioned?

Stuart McMillan: I am not going to take that.

As my colleague Christina McKelvie said, over the past eight years 177 schools were closed. Under the previous Labour-Liberal Democrat Executive, there was a net deficit of four schools.

Much has been made about the “brick for brick” commitment. I have every faith that the SNP Government will work towards fulfilling our manifesto commitment brick for brick, thus providing a school estate strategy to benefit Scottish pupils.

We have Labour, and its poodles the Lib Dems, to thank for eight years of PPP and the Tories to thank for introducing the policy.

Cathy Jamieson: Will the member take an intervention?

Stuart McMillan: I am sorry, but I do not have enough time.

Elizabeth Smith said that she was so proud that the Tories had introduced PPP. However, perhaps attitudes to PPP are changing in the Opposition parties. After Kenny MacAskill announced that the new prison for Bishopbriggs was no longer going to be funded via PPP, Wendy Alexander welcomed the decision.

Over the past eight years, some said that PPP was the only game in town and that we could not do anything about it. That struck me as the same as the tired old rhetoric that we are too small, we are not capable enough and we are too thick to develop things for ourselves. It is the same old nonsense that has kept Scotland in the union and set us back years and years.

I am thankful that the Scottish electorate voted out the tired old parties last year and gave the SNP the chance to provide a fresh impetus for Scotland. Furthermore, the electorate gave the SNP the opportunity to show that there are viable alternatives to PPP. The Scottish futures trust is out for consultation. I hope that the Opposition parties will take part in the consultation and that they will welcome the idea.

New schools are usually welcomed, provided that it is perceived that the correct and proper procedures have been followed to allow the public to have their say. I am afraid that the experience of the Lib Dems running Inverclyde Council over the past four years shows the way not to consult the public. Their arrogance and dismissal of the

Inverclyde public was supreme, and they paid the ultimate price last May by having their number of councillors reduced from 13 to 4 and losing control of the administration.

Michael McMahon (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab): Will the member take an intervention?

Stuart McMillan: I am sorry, but I do not have time.

Unfortunately, the current minority Labour administration in Inverclyde Council appears to be following in the same vein. I say to Ms Jamieson and Mr Macdonald that they should just ask the parents who send their children to Clune Park primary school in Port Glasgow, which is threatened with closure.

The unholy alliance of the current Labour-Tory coalition in East Dunbartonshire Council has signed off proposals for its £501 million PPP programme. New schools are fine and well, but making future generations of pupils in effect pay for the privilege of going to school is appalling. It smacks of privatisation of children's education.

I do not think that the SNP Government need take any lessons from Labour and the Lib Dems, given their record over the past eight years. That is why I urge members to reject Labour's ill-informed motion.

11:09

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): I welcome any and every opportunity to debate education and, in particular, building new schools for our young people. Labour has a proud record on the issue. Since 1999, we have delivered 328 new or refurbished schools. As they say in the Irn-Bru advert, that is phenomenal.

John Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Jackie Baillie: No. I am not even past my first minute. If the member waits around, I will take an intervention later.

We also committed to build a further 250 new schools, at least 100 of which were to be completed by 2009.

I have to confess that I was delighted when Alex Salmond promised to match Labour's school-building programme “brick for brick”—the investment in our schools, which was so desperately needed, was to be guaranteed. It is therefore a matter of great regret that the plans for Dumbarton academy, which previously were in West Dunbartonshire Council's regeneration plans, have now been scrapped. How will the SNP match Labour's school building programme brick for brick?

Gil Paterson (West of Scotland) (SNP):

Perhaps the member could inform the Parliament that 10 Labour members on West Dunbartonshire Council voted for the measure to which she refers and that there are only nine SNP members on that council.

Jackie Baillie: The SNP-controlled schools project board was the first on which the SNP casting vote was used, to remove Dumbarton academy from the programme. In the final council meeting—this is a matter of fact—the motion was moved by the SNP leader. The SNP group threatened that if the motion was not passed, investment would be cancelled in not just Dumbarton academy but Vale of Leven academy, Clydebank high school, St Andrew's high school, St Columba's high school and St Eunan's primary school. That was about playing politics with young people's education, which is a disgrace.

Just how will the SNP match Labour's school building programme brick for brick? Dumbarton academy was to be completed in 2009. Where have all the bricks for Dumbarton academy gone? How will the SNP guarantee that it is built by 2009? Dumbarton academy is one of Scotland's oldest schools; it was founded 500 years ago. Former pupils include Sir Jackie Stewart—although I gather that he was not too pleased with his time there—the novelist AJ Cronin and Professor John Brown, the astronomer royal for Scotland. The current school building is old and dilapidated and millions of pounds of investment is needed just to keep it wind and watertight. It is clearly not fit for purpose. More worryingly, the school does not have the facilities to meet the modern curriculum requirements for 21st century secondary schools in Scotland. As a consequence, learning opportunities for pupils are restricted—they have less choice and less opportunity.

Rhona Brankin and Elizabeth Smith are quite right: school buildings do make a difference to educational attainment. What about the huge disappointment for pupils, teachers and parents caused by no new investment for Dumbarton academy when, just up the road, there is a welcome new building for Vale of Leven academy and, in neighbouring Helensburgh, a new Hermitage academy is to be opened in February 2008? I say to Christina McKelvie that yes, those schools were built under PPP. She might want to reflect on her less generous comments about PPP, given that her own minister signed off 45 schools to be built under PPP.

The minister helpfully confirmed that the SNP will continue to match Labour's school building programme brick for brick, but phase 1 was for 100 schools by 2009, yet the minister appears to have indicated that only 45 schools have been

approved. Given that, by her own admission, it will take a while for any new projects to happen, could this be another broken promise?

I am happy to be corrected, but will the minister build 100 new schools by 2009? Where have the bricks for Dumbarton academy gone? Will the SNP intervene in West Dunbartonshire Council, as it did in Edinburgh, to ensure that the children and young people of Dumbarton are not disadvantaged? Will she today make an unequivocal commitment to a new Dumbarton academy by spring 2009?

11:14

Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): Is this debate not interesting? The Labour Opposition had eight years to deliver what it claims to have delivered—if it can agree on how much has been done. Along with its partners the Lib Dems, it suggests that everything was white before but it is all black now. However, given the waste in the system that Labour created—£2.1 billion more was spent on PPP—is it not time to draw breath and consider whether that form of procurement is the best way in which to proceed?

Cathy Jamieson: Does the member agree with the ministers who have signed off PPP projects and indicated that PPP will continue to be part of the mix? Does he agree that that is the right way forward?

Rob Gibson: Is it not obvious to Cathy Jamieson that the disruption that would be caused if the PPP projects that had been proposed were immediately cut would be undesirable? What would the Labour Party say if all those schools had been shut? The member should not be so silly. We know that continuity is part of the issue—it is not a case of white and black.

The problem has deep roots. This morning, the BBC news website ran a story that said:

"More than half the accommodation and facilities at primary schools visited by inspectors in the Inverness area were deemed to be of poor quality.

Of 22 primaries inspected, 14 were considered by HM Inspectorate of Education to be weak and one unsatisfactory."

I remind members that there are 44 schools in that part of the Highlands.

Such figures can be replicated in many places, as we have heard. The system that was in place needs to be changed so that we can get better buildings with more eco-friendly designs and so on. A pause for breath is required.

Rhona Brankin: Will the member give way?

Rob Gibson: I do not have time to take another intervention. I have taken one already; Rhona

Brankin clearly did not agree with my answer, so I doubt that she would agree with my answer to the question that she wants to ask me.

We are now in a position to think about the kind of schools that we build. We can see, in the way in which people are building eco-friendly houses and office buildings, that we could build schools that could last a good deal longer than the 30-year lifespan of the PPP projects. Thanks to Architecture and Design Scotland, we have an opportunity to review how the procurement process has affected design. It takes time to digest the situation; the Government is doing that, and we have every expectation that we will gain from that.

Architecture and Design Scotland said:

"The procurement methods employed do not always ensure real engagement between the client and the design team, or that high aspirations for design quality are maintained through to delivery."

It also said:

"it must be recognised that the constraints imposed by PPP/PFI processes (which predominated in the projects reviewed) have, in many cases, stifled debate and creativity."

If one thing is needed in relation to the schools that we are going to build to replace the ones in Inverness and everywhere else, it is the creativity that has not been present under the previous scheme. Our amendment proposes a funding system that will enable us to ensure that that creativity is present and to save some of the money that would otherwise be spent. Unfortunately, we have inherited certain commitments. As any responsible Government would do, we have said that we will meet those commitments. However, we must think carefully about the delivery of the next tranche of schools, because they have to be better designed and more pupil friendly. We have time to do that now, which is why the SNP amendment makes sense.

11:18

Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): In opening the debate, Rhona Brankin criticised SNP ministers for posing outside new schools that were commissioned by the previous coalition Executive. That was fair criticism. However, like other members, she talked about Labour's school building programme. Unless I am suffering from amnesia, that school building programme was the responsibility of a coalition Government. I give the Labour Party credit for that joint approach and I assume that the Labour Party gives the Liberal Democrats credit, too.

Elizabeth Smith highlighted the fact that the Scottish futures trust was causing confusion,

indecision and inaction. I could not have put it better myself. Maureen Watt responded by saying that the Government was building more schools. However, those schools were commissioned by the Labour and Liberal Democrat Administration. Indeed, Maureen Watt indicated that, when the SNP came to power, there were no plans for another round of the school building programme. However, she knows as well as I do—because we both represent constituents in Aberdeenshire—that that is not the case. Aberdeenshire Council has drawn up a £200 million new school building programme, at the behest of the previous Administration. In my constituency, the previous coalition Government approved funding for a new academy in Portlethen and new primaries in Lairhillock and Hill of Banchory, which everyone welcomed. We are in desperate need of new academies in Laurencekirk, Alford and Banchory, and of primaries in Portlethen and elsewhere.

Maureen Watt: Does the member accept that we have given £3 billion to local authorities precisely so that they can go ahead and build those schools?

Mike Rumbles: I am sorry, but the amount of money that has come in is not sufficient for a new school building programme. The minister must know that.

We cannot afford to wait for the SNP Government to get its act together. The suspicion is that the issue is being kicked into the long grass; indeed, the consultation went out on the Parliament's very last sitting day before Christmas—how unlike the SNP not to blow its own trumpet.

There is a huge amount of confusion over the Government's Scottish futures trust. It seems that, rather than have a straightforward PPP process, with the school assets eventually being transferred to our local authorities, the so-called Scottish futures trust will result in the schools—if they are ever built—never returning to our local authorities.

The debate shows that, although the SNP has not blocked any of the schools that were commissioned by the coalition Government—I give the SNP credit for that decision, but not for the schools, which are the responsibility of the previous Administration—it does not want to continue the PPP process into another phase of the school building programme. Rather, the SNP wants its own scheme. The SNP is desperate to invent a new scheme. It cannot go back to the traditional way of investing in school buildings, because it does not have the necessary money in its budget, and it does not like the PPP approach, because that was the approach of the previous Administration and it is ideologically opposed to it.

The result of the SNP's desperation is confusion, indecision and delay. The schools

throughout Scotland that need to be replaced are not being replaced, and there is no plan in place for that to happen. The children in those schools deserve a Government that takes action. However, today, we hear good words from the Government but see no action. The SNP Administration must get a grip, for our kids' sakes. We need action. Our children deserve decent buildings in which to learn.

11:22

Elizabeth Smith: I apologise for the absence of my colleague Murdo Fraser, who is, apparently, stuck on the Forth road bridge as a result of this morning's accident.

I congratulate Labour on securing the debate. As Jeremy Purvis said, it should serve to focus our minds on an extremely important issue that goes to the heart of our communities, as Dr Macdonald eloquently said. Whether schools will be built is something that matters to people.

This morning, the SNP and Labour have traded insults about the numbers of schools that have or have not been built. However, we want to know how many schools will be built in the future. The SNP has not come to the chamber with the details of its plans. Quite frankly, that is not acceptable in terms of its manifesto commitments, or from the point of view of the business community and contractors who might want to build the new schools. Further, as Mike Rumbles just said, it is certainly not acceptable in terms of the education of our young people.

As Cathy Jamieson and Mike Rumbles said, we have not had the details of any of the Government's proposals. Worryingly, we have had confusion over the nature of the Scottish futures trust. As several members have said, the least that we expected was that we would get the principles that would allow us to engage in the debate. However, that has not happened. As I said in my opening remarks, the situation before the election seems to be very different from the situation after the election. The Government owes it to Scotland to tell the Parliament what it plans to do.

George Foulkes: Does Elizabeth Smith share my concern about the SNP Government's suggestion that there was no forward plan by Labour and the Liberal Democrats for the building of more schools this year, next year and so on? The coalition Administration built schools year after year. In Edinburgh we had wave 1 and wave 2, so it is inconceivable that we would not have moved to wave 3, in which Portobello high school and Boroughmuir high school would have been replaced. It really is—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Foulkes, this is a rather long intervention.

George Foulkes: Yes, it is.

It is not just mischievous but downright untruthful of the SNP to keep repeating its suggestion that there was no forward plan.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You are a bit mischievous yourself.

Elizabeth Smith: I share George Foulkes's concern, because we owe it to people to tell them which schools will be built, when they will be built and how the build will be financed. That is the crux of the debate, but I am not sure that we have heard many answers from the Government.

Jackie Baillie made a relevant point about the changing nature of the curriculum. It is true that schools have to change to reflect the changing curriculum and their communities. Far more people are involved in schools these days, and communities take part in school activities in a way that did not happen in the past. That must be reflected in the building programme and in the financing.

The issue is crucial if we are to deliver better education in Scotland. We owe it to our people and, above all, to our children. It is time that the Government came forward with plans that we can debate in detail.

11:26

The Minister for Children and Early Years (Adam Ingram): It shows how out of touch with Scottish public opinion the former coalition partners remain that they have chosen today's debate to attack the SNP's progressive and prudent approach to renewing the school estate.

As for the attacks on school closures, members should know that Labour's school estate strategy called for rationalisation of the school estate. The Government will take no hypocritical lectures from Labour and the likes of Cathy Jamieson, who when she was Minister for Education and Young People axed every school that was referred to her for a decision.

Lewis Macdonald: Will the minister give way?

Adam Ingram: No, I will not. Please sit down.

I remind members that the PFI/PPP approach of the previous Administration was deeply unpopular with taxpayers, not least because people realised that this generation and the next would pay through their noses to honour PPP contracts.

Jeremy Purvis: Will the minister give way?

Adam Ingram: Sit down, please.

PPP contracts have produced poorer quality schools than could have been achieved by alternative forms of procurement. Members need

not take my word for that; they need only refer to the excellent briefing that was produced for the debate by Architecture and Design Scotland.

Rhona Brankin *rose*—

Adam Ingram: The blame for those poor outcomes, such as restricted community access, must lie firmly at the doorstep of the previous Administration. Local authorities were forced to play PPP as the only game in town if they wanted significant investment in new and refurbished schools.

Cathy Jamieson *rose*—

Rhona Brankin: Will the minister take an intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I do not think that the minister is taking an intervention.

Adam Ingram: By contrast, the SNP has higher ambitions for the school estate and for Scottish education. There will be no third wave of PPP school projects. We have taken the pragmatic decision to allow existing projects to proceed, because to have done otherwise would have been unfair on communities whose expectations of new schools have been raised to a high pitch—not to mention the costly consequences of cancellation.

Rhona Brankin: Will the minister visit schools in my constituency that were built under PPP, to see the excellent quality of those schools and the teaching and learning that go on in them? Will he get to the point and say how many schools the Government will build?

Adam Ingram: We are committed to building the 100 schools between 2007 and 2009 that Labour members mentioned. Those schools will be in place. By 2011, I am confident that we will have reached the number that you—sorry, Presiding Officer—the Labour Party committed to in its manifesto.

Our brick-for-brick commitment is being realised in full and we are going further. Over the next three years, some £3 billion is being provided to secure investment in infrastructure at local government level, which includes schools. That represents a 15 per cent increase in each year of the settlement, compared with this year's figures. In addition, local authorities can use the prudential borrowing schemes to access private finance at a much cheaper cost than PPP, which has credit-card rates of interest. There will also be the Scottish futures trust to look forward to. Our clear intention is to provide a series of affordable options for local authorities that seek to improve schools in their areas. I am confident that PPP will wither on the vine, as unlamented as it was unloved.

I am also confident that when private gain is removed as a motivating factor in design and

delivery, the emphasis in school building will shift to the quality and sustainability of facilities. The contribution that schools can make to our climate change strategy will move centre stage, where the issue belongs.

The top concern of voters during the election campaign was the high cost of, and mortgaging of our children's future through, PPP projects. That is why we await the publication of the Audit Scotland report on the school estate, so that we can consider the lessons that can be learned from what has gone before and how they should influence where we go next. That is what the voters expect of the Government. We are committed to improving the learning experience of children and young people by improving the fabric of schools. We look forward to bringing detailed plans to the Parliament in due course. I pledge that our plans will represent a clean break from the failures of the Labour-Liberal Democrat Administration.

11:32

Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): When is a promise not a promise? When it is made by the SNP in the run-up to a general election. The SNP said that it would match Labour's school building programme brick for brick. That was a nice turn of phrase, which created an illusion of something solid and tangible. I am sure that there was no doubt in voters' minds that the SNP's commitment was one of substance.

Oh dear. No sooner had the new brass nameplates been put up on SNP offices up and down the country than the words began to ring hollow. The SNP said, "Brick for brick just means that we will finish off the projects that are already under contract or are too far down the line to cancel. You thought you were going to get a new school? We don't know how you got that impression. Was it something we said?"

The phrase "brick for brick" recalls another nice-sounding promise: the promise to repay student debt. Nicola Sturgeon said, using carefully chosen words:

"We will effectively stand in the shoes of Scottish students ... and take on the burden of their debt."

Fine words indeed from the SNP, but now that the party is in government we find that it did not mean them. There has been another misunderstanding. The promises to repay student debt and match Labour's school building programme brick for brick have been broken.

The SNP says that we should wait, because the new Scottish futures trust will make good on its promises. We have waited patiently. We waited for the spending review, but there was nothing in it. We waited for the budget, but there was nothing in

it. Now we are waiting for the Scottish futures trust.

The minister's front-bench colleague Kenny MacAskill has given the game away. While he was talking about the promised new Portobello high school in Edinburgh, he told parents not to wait for the third round of PPP or for funding from the Scottish futures trust but to find the money from the city's capital resources. Here is a simple question for ministers: can they promise me that any of the current roll at Portobello high school will enjoy the new building? Can they deliver their promise in six years? It appears that they cannot.

Ministers have refused to answer several questions. Rhona Brankin posed three questions about the new Scottish futures trust, which were echoed by Liz Smith. I will repeat just one question. How many schools will be built under the new model? Such questions are not too much to ask of the Executive, but they are not being answered. Why? Jeremy Purvis gave us the answer when he highlighted the confusion and delay that are at the heart of the Government. In opposition, the SNP ruled out PPP/PFI, but now, it appears—in Mr Purvis's words—to be supping with the devil.

What did we hear from the minister? Maureen Watt tried to take the credit for projects that are in the pipeline. She suggested that traditional local authority capital funding routes would be enough to meet the demand for new buildings. That was not our promise and that is not matching us. Members throughout the Opposition parties highlighted the hypocrisy of the SNP's position—not so much a futures trust as a breach of trust, as Cathy Jamieson pointedly put it. From Ayrshire to Aberdeen, as Lewis Macdonald added, we have heard the stark reality of the SNP's policies in practice—it is not building new schools, but closing schools.

What is galling about the SNP's brick-for-brick promise is that it is framed in terms of Labour's commitment. It is not a stand-alone proposal that was drawn up by free thinkers. The SNP does not have its own target, but it has framed one that acknowledges the strength of Labour—and Lib Dem—achievements in investing in our schools and it has tried to piggyback on our success.

The SNP's one argument has been to question how many schools we built, yet it tries to trade on our record of building those schools. The promise suggests, "Anything you can do, we can do better." I suppose that we should be flattered, yet the SNP is not only taking Labour as its benchmark, but cynically trying to trade on our reputation for delivering social justice and decent public services, although all the evidence on the SNP points to the contrary.

By their decisions shall ye know them. In the SNP's budget, the priority is not new schools and social justice, but reductions in business rates and in council tax for the better-off. That is supported not by the progressive parties in the Parliament but—you guessed it—by the Tories.

Christina McKelvie: Will the member confirm that Labour closed more schools than it built?

Ken Macintosh: Not only is the SNP not matching Labour's record on new-build schools and refurbished schools, but it is not even close to matching that record.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Macintosh, it would help if you spoke into your microphone. You should know that.

Ken Macintosh: I am sorry, Presiding Officer.

I have asked the SNP several times how many new schools it has commissioned. For how many schools can it take credit? The answer appears to be none. The SNP promised to match us brick for brick. We promised 250 new schools; the SNP has delivered none. What does that mean for pupils and parents around Scotland? It means disappointment for all families. I stood on an election promise of a brand-new Barrhead high school and a brand-new Eastwood high school. I will not stand on my pride if the SNP delivers on its promise to match me brick for brick but, with the SNP's broken promises on police numbers, on support for first-time home buyers, on class sizes, on student debt and now on school building, the SNP's manifesto is coming apart, brick for brick.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: As the debate has finished early, I suspend the meeting for a minute.

11:38

Meeting suspended.

11:39

On resuming—

Question Time

SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

General Questions

Oligohydramnios

1. Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what checks are in place to ensure that signs and symptoms associated with oligohydramnios (low amniotic fluid) are identified in the third trimester of pregnancy, particularly after the due date. (S3O-2150)

The Minister for Public Health (Shona Robison): The “Framework for maternity services in Scotland” describes the schedule of routine care that all pregnant women should receive. Integral to that is routine examination to ensure maternal and foetal well-being and to identify any deviations from the normal, including low amniotic fluid.

Elaine Smith: My question arises from the heartbreaking circumstances that a constituent brought to my attention in which her sister's baby was stillborn 12 days past the due date in November as a result of amniotic fluid deficiency. Is the minister aware that the condition is relatively easily checked out by an ultrasound scan? As the consequences of leaving the condition undetected can be tragic, will the minister consider instructing an investigation into more rigorous procedures for detection and prevention, particularly after the due date has been reached? Will she assure us that she will give urgent attention to the issue, which is literally a matter of life or death?

Shona Robison: A woman should have continuous risk assessment throughout her pregnancy, which should take into account the risk status, which might change over time. Consideration should be given to the fact that a woman can move between levels of care throughout a pregnancy. The level of care that is given should reflect that and should be managed under local guidelines and referral arrangements. A risk assessment should be repeated towards the end of a pregnancy, to provide up-to-date information to allow a woman and her carers to reassess plans for childbirth.

Given the concerns that Elaine Smith has raised, I am happy to look into whether more rigorous detection and prevention measures are required. I will come back to her on that.

Science Education (Support)

2. Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what its education and lifelong learning department is doing through the Scottish universities physics alliance to support science. (S3O-2138)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Fiona Hyslop): The Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council has provided £6.9 million to support the Scottish universities physics alliance, which aims to strengthen physics research. The initiative is still at an early phase, but it has succeeded in attracting excellent international researchers and graduate students to Scotland.

Ken Macintosh: Is the cabinet secretary aware that the Scottish funding council's delay to decisions on funding for the Scottish universities physics alliance could threaten jobs and research programmes? Is she aware of the benefit of such programmes to the Scottish economy and to innovation in science? Will she reassure me that she will do all that she can to ensure that, whatever decisions are taken elsewhere, stand-alone projects and programmes in Scotland receive her backing and the scientific community in Scotland is fully aware of the support for it from the Parliament and the Executive?

Fiona Hyslop: The Government is very supportive of the pooling arrangements, of which SUPA is one part. The only delay to funding has resulted from the delay to Westminster's funding arrangements for the budget settlement. The allocations to universities from the funding council were discussed at a meeting last week.

I draw the member's attention to the serious point that the Science and Technology Facilities Council, which is funded by the Westminster Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills, has had to announce an £80 million cut in its planned programme and a 25 per cent cut in research grants, which will significantly affect the physics alliance's proposals. I reassure the Parliament that my colleague, Jim Mather, has made representations to John Denham, the relevant minister, to ask him to suspend part of the council's delivery plan until the review into the health of physics, which the same Mr Denham commissioned, is completed. The matter is serious and I think that all members urge the Westminster Government to continue to support physics and science and regret the decisions that it has made.

Bob Doris (Glasgow) (SNP): I join David Caldwell, who is the director of Universities Scotland, in welcoming the additional £10 million that the Government has given the higher education sector. I ask for details about the

possibility of a concordat with higher education institutions. I hope that—

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): The question was on support for science, Mr Doris.

Bob Doris: And higher education.

The Presiding Officer: It was specifically on support for science.

Bob Doris: Will support for science be part of any future concordat with higher education institutions?

The Presiding Officer: You are learning fast, Mr Doris.

Fiona Hyslop: I thank the member for his recognition that I managed to release £10 million from our budgets this year to support the university sector. That money has been warmly welcomed by all concerned.

Many subjects will be discussed at next week's meeting of the joint future thinking task force, and the possibility and appropriateness of a concordat or covenant will no doubt arise during the coming months. I think that Ken Macintosh referred to collaboration in physics and science in Scotland. Such collaboration is a model for the future development of our university sector. Collaboration and co-operation will be a part of any future arrangements in the university sector.

Rhona Brankin (Midlothian) (Lab): Does the minister agree that the £10 million that has been mentioned will merely pay for salary rises for university lecturers? Does she agree that a significant funding gap still exists?

The Presiding Officer: I repeat that the question was on support for science. However, the minister may answer the member's question.

Fiona Hyslop: I am delighted that the Government will give a higher percentage of the total budget to the university sector over the next spending review period than the previous Government did over a similar spending review period. Moreover, the Government will carry through what it said about supporting universities with in-year flexibility. I am delighted to say that the £10 million that I have released from my budget will help to tackle staffing pressures in universities. We committed to doing that, and we have delivered on that.

Class Sizes (Parental Choice)

3. Marlyn Glen (North East Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what legal advice it has been given on the impact on parental choice legislation of its pledge to reduce class sizes to 18 in primary 1 to primary 3. (S3O-2124)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Fiona Hyslop): As members may be aware, the Scottish Government's practice is neither to confirm nor to deny whether legal advice has been received on any issue.

Marlyn Glen: I thank the minister for her answer, although it is not particularly helpful.

What will happen? I think that everyone understands that the Scottish Government intends to make local authorities responsible for delivering many of its promises. In some areas, class sizes will fall naturally as a result of reductions in the number of children in those areas, but the expectations of teachers and parents throughout Scotland have been raised.

How will the minister make it possible to fulfil the promises on classrooms and teacher numbers throughout Scotland, while still allowing parental choice? Will she, for example, clarify what will happen to parental choice if local authorities choose to reserve places for pupils who are moving into catchment areas? How will such an approach fit in with the pledge that has been made?

Fiona Hyslop: I am pleased to say that the Government has a positive and constructive relationship with local government—indeed, I had a positive meeting on class sizes with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities only this week. My officials have met representatives of a number of local authorities—six, I think—to discuss the practical implications of the popular policy of reducing class sizes. One important thing about Scottish education is that the vast majority of parents want to send their children to local schools because those schools are effective and excellent. It is important that that continues.

We have no plans to change our parental choice policy. We trust local authorities to manage their school estate, allocations and catchment areas in a satisfactory manner.

Sheriff Principal (Glasgow and Strathkelvin) (Meetings)

4. David Whitton (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive when it last met the sheriff principal of Glasgow and Strathkelvin. (S3O-2153)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): Scottish Government officials frequently meet the sheriff principal of Glasgow and Strathkelvin to discuss a range of matters.

David Whitton: I met Sheriff Principal Taylor 10 days ago to discuss the operation of the family court contact centre in his area. As the minister will know, that centre is run by volunteers who do an excellent job, but demand for their services

outstrips supply and the centre is not always open because they are volunteers. As a result, one of my constituents did not see his son at all in December. The sheriffs and the family courts know that that is a problem, as is the fact that contact orders are too often broken.

The Presiding Officer: Will you ask a question, please, Mr Whitton?

David Whitton: I am coming to it, Presiding Officer.

The Presiding Officer: Quickly, I hope.

David Whitton: I am sorry.

Does the Government have any plans to put contact centres on a more official footing so that they have their own staff? That would lead to more flexible opening hours and would allow fathers and mothers to meet their children not only on Saturdays, but on a more flexible basis through the week. Perhaps they could meet their children in the evenings or after work.

Kenny MacAskill: I am aware of Mr Whitton's interest in the issue, which he is right to raise, and I have seen correspondence with a ministerial colleague. We must ensure that the child remains at the centre of things. Some parents—often fathers—have difficulties maintaining contact with their children. The Government provides funding for contact centres through Family Mediation Scotland, which provides a range of support. We are happy to consider the issue. We have taken the position that the previous Administration correctly took.

As I said, the child must always be at the centre of things. Difficulties frequently arise between parents and, unfortunately, children can be caught in the resulting fire-storm. It is important to make facilities available, make arrangements, and try to negotiate settlements. I would be happy to discuss such matters with the member. As I said, the contact centres are dealt with through Family Mediation Scotland. We think that that is the best system at the moment.

Language Learning (Schools)

5. Irene Oldfather (Cunninghame South) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what importance it attaches to language learning in schools. (S3O-2145)

The Minister for Schools and Skills (Maureen Watt): The Government places great importance on people learning languages so that they can extend their horizons and widen their opportunities in later life. The draft outcomes and experiences for modern languages in the curriculum for excellence programme will raise the bar in respect of our expectations of what young people can achieve with their modern languages learning.

Language learning in schools has a key role to play in ensuring that our young people are successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens.

Irene Oldfather: Is the minister aware of the partnership project in my area that involves Ayrshire Chamber of Commerce, Prestwick airport and local schools? The aim of the project is to produce a five-minute film in a modern language to attract visitors to Ayrshire. Does she agree that such projects should be promoted and supported? Is she aware of the genuine concern of educationists—it was expressed as recently as yesterday—about whether such projects will continue to be funded as a result of the removal of ring fencing for the modern languages budget?

Maureen Watt: I reassure the member that there is absolutely no reason why such innovative and good projects should not continue and be extended throughout Scotland as good practice.

Dave Thompson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I am sure that the minister is aware of recent research by the University of Edinburgh that shows the advantages of learning Gaelic as a second language—and, indeed, the advantages of bilingualism as a whole. Given the success of the likes of Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Inbhir Nis in expanding Gaelic education, what measures is the Scottish Government taking to capitalise on current successes?

Maureen Watt: As I said in my earlier reply, we are keen to ensure that good practice in the development and teaching of languages—whether Gaelic or any foreign language—is rolled out across Scotland. It is important that our youngsters can speak a second language. Employers will be keen to take them on, as they can train them in whichever language they want for their business. It is important that we show that our young learners are competent in foreign languages.

British Council Symposium

6. Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what conclusions it drew from the recent British Council symposium, "Scotland's Place in the World". (S3O-2079)

The Minister for Europe, External Affairs and Culture (Linda Fabiani): The conference was a particularly good opportunity to hear a range of academic and expert opinions on how Scotland might approach what is nowadays sometimes called public diplomacy. I am finding those opinions useful in drawing up the Government's international strategic framework, which will set out how we will pursue sustainable economic

growth by promoting Scotland as a great place to live, learn, visit, work, do business and invest.

Rob Gibson: I welcome that framework and the opportunity to showcase Scottish culture in other lands. Does the minister have plans to promote Scottish performance arts in Stavanger and Liverpool, which are this year's European capitals of culture? What support does she propose to provide to encourage Scottish performers and artists who play in other countries to bring similar artists from those countries to play in Scotland?

Linda Fabiani: First, relative to Stavanger and Liverpool, the organisers of Stavanger 2008 have initiated an exchange project with Scotland called the North Sea project. It includes a variety of cultural activities and has some support from the Scottish Arts Council, which is also supporting Scottish dance groups to appear at Liverpool 2008. It is crucial that we take maximum advantage of our wonderful culture in our promotion of Scotland overseas. One example of that, which I attended recently, was the showcasing event at Celtic Connections, which has grown over the years into a week of events for promoters and others from throughout the world to come and see Scottish music at its best. That is something that we should be proud of and build upon.

Ted Brocklebank (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Does the minister agree that Scotland's place in the world is exactly what it has been for the past 300 years, which is one of the four partners in one of the most successful political unions the world has ever seen?

Linda Fabiani: I look forward to the day when Scotland can take its true place in the world. That is what I am working towards.

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab): Does the minister agree that apart from the wonderful Eddi Reader, the highlight of the symposium was a presentation on the play "Black Watch" in America by an American professor? I congratulate the National Theatre of Scotland on its outstanding success with that and other works. Does the minister acknowledge the foresight of the previous Administration in agreeing to establish and fund a national theatre? Will she undertake to increase funding over the next few years to that outstanding theatre company?

Linda Fabiani: Unfortunately, I was unable to attend the presentation, which I think was from Professor Merrill. I heard that it was excellent. He talked about the role of cultural diplomacy in the promotion of Scotland and the huge advantage in that of Scotland's fantastic culture. Everyone knows how successful "Black Watch" has been. The establishment of the National Theatre of

Scotland was welcomed across the political board. Is it not fantastic that it is here? Everyone also knows that the Government will always support and promote its national companies, at home and overseas, for maximum advantage for this nation.

Eastern European Languages (Schools)

7. Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what steps it will take to encourage the teaching of eastern European languages in schools. (S3O-2078)

The Minister for Schools and Skills (Maureen Watt): It is up to local authorities, in dialogue with schools, to decide what range of languages will be offered in schools to reflect local needs and priorities. Ministers are aware that some education authorities are under pressure to accommodate the needs of children who have English as an additional language. Officials have had meetings at senior level with representatives of the Educational Institute of Scotland and the Scottish EAL co-ordinating council to discuss those issues. The recently announced funding and delivery partnerships between the Scottish Government and local government contain measures to address additional support needs in education, including those arising from EAL.

Kenneth Gibson: Does the minister agree that encouraging social, cultural and economic links with eastern European accession states and non-European Union nations such as Russia and Ukraine is vital to secure bilateral economic growth and political stability in the east? Does she further agree that encouraging the teaching of eastern European languages in our schools, alongside French, Spanish, German and indigenous Scottish languages, will help to ensure that Scottish businesses have the personnel available to market our country in eastern Europe and thus secure jobs and investment here in Scotland?

Maureen Watt: Yes. As I said in reply to a previous question, learning more languages will help to strengthen economic and political benefits. As many people are coming to Scotland from the eastern European accession states, it is right that schools embrace the languages of those cultures. In some schools, the children themselves are asking to learn the languages of the new pupils. That is great because in the long term it will secure economic and political benefits for Scotland and help business growth in Scotland, which is precisely what the Government wants.

The Presiding Officer: A brief supplementary, please, from Rhona Brankin.

Rhona Brankin: The minister mentioned that pupils who speak other languages are covered by additional support for learning. The Scottish

National Party's manifesto promised an additional £30 million for an additional support for learning fund. Where is it? Is it another example of another broken promise?

The Presiding Officer: An equally brief answer, please, minister.

Maureen Watt: It is still there.

First Minister's Question Time

12:00

Engagements

1. Ms Wendy Alexander (Paisley North) (Lab):

To ask the First Minister what engagements he has planned for the rest of the day. (S3F-469)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): Later today, I will have meetings to take forward the Government's programme for Scotland. Those will include joining the consul general for India in the celebrations of India's independence. I am sure that the whole Parliament will want to acknowledge and celebrate the independence of the world's largest democracy.

Ms Alexander: I think that we could join the First Minister in wishing India well.

How long are Scotland's pensioners currently waiting for installation of their free central heating systems?

The First Minister: What I know about free central heating installation is that the action that the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing has taken to repair some of the deficiencies in the scheme that we inherited from the Labour and Liberal parties has resulted in a substantial improvement, but nobody is pretending that the scheme is working effectively. We inherited a scheme, the terms of which had been set and the practitioners in which had been established by the previous Government. Increasingly, we are finding that almost nothing that we inherited from the previous Government works effectively.

Ms Alexander: That answer will be cold comfort to Scotland's pensioners, because what they care about is results. In May, Scottish pensioners were waiting, on average, 114 days to get a new system. They are now waiting 229 days on average—almost eight months—so in many cases the wait is much longer. Does the First Minister think that it is acceptable that the waiting time for pensioners to have their heating systems replaced has doubled under his stewardship?

The First Minister: We do not think that the scheme that we inherited is acceptable, which is why we have introduced 1,500 extra installations over the course of the winter. That will result in a record 15,000 installations in the course of the financial year. That seems to me to be effective action to tackle a problem that we inherited from Wendy Alexander's colleagues.

Ms Alexander: This is about the track record of this Government. It is nothing to boast of that the First Minister's Government has doubled the average wait for pensioners. When the Scottish

National Party came to power, barely a thousand pensioners were waiting more than three months for their free central heating systems. Today, the figure is more than 6,500. The reality for those pensioners is that they now have to choose either to freeze or to pay up themselves. That is unacceptable. What will the First Minister do about it?

The First Minister: We inherited from the previous Administration plans and a budget to install 13,500 systems in the course of this financial year. Because we recognised that the figure was inadequate, we have increased it by 1,500. Nobody is pretending that the scheme is perfect in any respect. How could it be when it was devised by the Labour and Liberal parties? If the previous Administration thought that 13,500 installations was adequate, why does Wendy Alexander not acknowledge and welcome the increase to 15,000 under this Administration?

Ms Alexander: The SNP's contribution to the central heating scheme since May has been that the waiting lists are getting longer, the average waiting time has doubled and the installation rate is down.

Let me turn to the promised 15,000 systems by April. The First Minister will be aware that the latest figures show that his Government had managed barely 8,000 of those by the end of December. We seem to be on track for another broken promise. It is a strange kind of improvement in which waiting lists are twice as long and are getting longer, the installation rate is down and the 15,000 systems are not going to be delivered.

Look at the weather around the country. There will be pensioners who applied in November who will be freezing in February and who will still be waiting in June. Is the First Minister now willing to apologise to those pensioners who will be freezing in February because of his failure?

The First Minister: Wendy Alexander should be apologising generally to Scotland for the legacy that we inherited from the Labour and Liberal parties.

What is certain is that installations will reach a record number in this financial year. Therefore, by definition, fewer people will be waiting than would have been the case if the Labour and Liberal parties were still in power. Of course, people are worried and concerned about heating costs throughout Scotland because of rising fuel bills. They will also be concerned that Scotland receives no benefit from the vast escalation of revenues that are flooding into the Westminster Exchequer.

I am delighted that Wendy Alexander recognises the impact of rising energy costs and, I hope, of rising transport costs. Perhaps she will join us in

demanding that Scotland get some benefit from its own natural resources, so that we can fund the schemes and not have fuel poverty amid energy plenty.

Finally, I point out to Wendy Alexander that statistics that were published today indicate a 20 per cent rise in public confidence in, and satisfaction with, the governance of Scotland. How on earth does she explain that fantastic rise in people's confidence in the Government? I join colleagues in saying that I have full confidence in her continuing leadership of the Labour Party in Scotland.

Secretary of State for Scotland (Meetings)

2. Annabel Goldie (West of Scotland) (Con): To ask the First Minister when he will next meet the Secretary of State for Scotland. (S3F-470)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): I met the secretary of state last Friday to discuss the implementation of the recommendations of the Gould report. I think it only fair to report to the Parliament that I did not find the secretary of state as enthusiastic as the Scottish Parliament about the idea of this Parliament having control over its own electoral system.

Annabel Goldie: On such a dreich day, it may be uplifting to talk about a blaze—the blaze of quangos to which the First Minister referred yesterday. Admittedly, his blaze was a bit of an overstatement. In fact, it was variously described in the newspapers as a “barbecue” a “campfire” and a “vanity of the bonfires”. The reality is that, in playing to his party gallery in Aviemore last year, the First Minister plucked from the air the arbitrary figure of 25 per cent. I presume that, since then, he has had his officials scurrying around, valiantly trying to meet his whim. The result? It is nothing more than renaming, rebadging, mergers and amalgamations—not real cuts.

Despite, I am sure, the best briefing, the First Minister hid behind his fig leaf of an alleged 26 per cent cut in the number of quangos and refused to answer the real question, so I will ask it again. Let us take as read all his fulsome generalisations, evasions and spin of yesterday and cut to the chase. Will his blaze reduce the number of persons who are employed and the cost to the taxpayer by more than or less than 26 per cent?

The First Minister: It certainly will not reduce the number of people who are employed in those organisations by 26 per cent. As I explained to Annabel Goldie yesterday, we are implementing a policy of no compulsory redundancies and many of the functions that have been identified are key functions that remain part of Scottish governance. The question is whether we should pursue those functions through the existing 199 national public

bodies in Scotland or do as we have done and cut the number of those bodies to 120, perhaps with further cuts to come.

Our argument for efficiency in governance rests on the performance of the Government and the meeting of a 2 per cent efficiency target year on year during the next three years. It also relies on the argument that simplification of the process of government will result in vast savings to the rest of Scottish society. The private sector might generate as much as £800 million if we assume a 1 per cent efficiency saving as the result of more effective governance in Scotland.

Many quangos and national public organisations were set up by the Labour Government, but many were also set up in Scotland by previous Conservative Administrations. Given the direction in which Annabel Goldie wants to travel, I would have thought that she would have joined us in welcoming the substantial reduction in the complexity of Government, and the substantial cut in the number of agencies and quangos across Scotland.

Annabel Goldie: I will happily compare the number of quangos and all the other appendages of state that we have now with what we had when the Conservatives were in government.

I listened to the First Minister's response. My argument is about fairness and transparency for the taxpayer. The whole exercise will have very little significance unless we have some feel for, or indication of, whether the cuts will mean reducing staff numbers and costs to the taxpayer.

At least some light has been shed on the situation: we now know that there will be no more than a 26 per cent reduction in either of the components to which I referred. So, let us try and shed more light on the situation. I will be generous to the First Minister by saying that if he cannot give me a specific answer, can he give me a ballpark figure? Is it some per cent or no per cent? Surely he can answer that one.

The First Minister: I will be very specific. We have identified the argument for taking Communities Scotland into the Government instead of leaving it as an agency. That alone will generate efficiency savings of £1.7 million. As we go through the process of simplification of government, we will achieve substantial savings and efficiencies for the Government and for Scottish society as a whole.

I know that the Opposition's leaders have to criticise everything and all things; I well understand that that is their role. However, looking again at the figures for satisfaction with, and trust in, the governance of Scotland, I find out that not only do 71 per cent of people trust the governance of Scotland—a record number—but 4 per cent do

not trust the Government of Scotland on any occasion. I suspect that Annabel Goldie might be one of the 4 per cent, but I hope that she will soon join the 71 per cent.

Cabinet (Meetings)

3. Nicol Stephen (Aberdeen South) (LD): To ask the First Minister what issues will be discussed at the next meeting of the Cabinet. (S3F-471)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): The next meeting of the Cabinet will discuss issues of importance to the people of Scotland.

Nicol Stephen: Yesterday, Nicola Sturgeon announced that all health boards were meeting their 18-week waiting target. Under the First Minister's Government, have any patients who still need treatment been deliberately removed from those waiting lists in order for the health boards to meet their target?

The First Minister: The purpose of the Government's and the SNP's direction of travel is to remove the hidden waiting lists that were so much a feature of the Government of which Nicol Stephen was such a prominent member. I would have thought that it is cause for celebration that we were able to announce this week that every health authority in Scotland was able to meet its target at the end of the year. Surely that is something on which Nicol Stephen could join the 71 per cent who are satisfied and not stay with the 4 per cent who are dissatisfied.

Nicol Stephen: Why then did a patient recently receive the following letter from her consultant? It says:

"I am afraid I am writing to inform you of some bad news. I have been instructed by hospital management to remove your name from my waiting list. The prime reason for this decision relates to the 18-week target for patient treatment which is now enforced. I currently have a significant number of patients in breach of this, and the simple solution by management is to reduce my waiting list by removing patients' names."

It is shocking and scandalous to discover a situation in which the First Minister's targets are achieved by dumping patients off the list. Will the First Minister promise to end such manipulation of the figures and ensure that patients who have been devastated by letters such as the one from which I read will now receive treatment from his Government?

The First Minister: I will be delighted to look at the individual circumstances of that letter and am delighted to reaffirm that this Government will not have the manipulation of waiting lists that was carried out by the previous Administration. As First Minister, I will be delighted—as will the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing—to look at

those circumstances and to deal with anything that might have been wrongly done in that patient's case. Nicol Stephen seems, however, to have a spot of amnesia: let us remember that the 18-week target was introduced two years ago by the previous Administration.

Nicol Stephen: Of course, we sent details of the case to the health secretary, but should not the First Minister spend a little less time frothing about all that and a little more time regretting the situation and taking urgent action to assist such patients?

The First Minister: Urgent action is being taken across the health service, which is why the targets were met at the end of last year.

When did Nicol Stephen send the information to the health secretary? We are delighted to pursue actively queries from individual MSPs, including Nicol Stephen, who are representing their constituents. If he supplies us with the details, we will take the effective action that this Government is known for and which his Government notably failed to take.

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): I will take a supplementary question from Sarah Boyack.

Sarah Boyack (Edinburgh Central) (Lab): I welcome the First Minister's comment at the weekend that he will do all he can to safeguard the jobs of the 1,000 highly skilled Scottish & Newcastle plc staff in Edinburgh and the Lothians. Will he do everything he can to ensure that the positions of the many other staff in the city who depend on work with Scottish & Newcastle, such as those who work in our marketing agencies and our legal and accountancy firms, are also considered by the Scottish Government? Will he join me in calling on the potential new owners of Scottish & Newcastle to be aware of the significant support that the firm has offered to the development of the city's culture, as well as its economy, through the provision of long-standing financial support for organisations such as the national museum of Scotland, the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, and the Edinburgh international festival, which has been an important part of the company's reputation and its relationship with the capital?

The First Minister: Yes—a meeting has been offered and agreed with the potential new owners of Scottish & Newcastle to discuss whether we can make progress on those very points.

As soon as the situation developed, the Government set up a task force involving Jim Mather, the industry minister. It is important that we do that. Our initial analysis, which is supported by industry commentators, suggests that the substantial majority of jobs in Scotland look to be

secure under the new circumstances. However, there is a serious question about the continuing functions of the group headquarters in Edinburgh, where about 100 staff are employed. Those highly skilled jobs are very important not just to Edinburgh, but to Scotland as a whole. When we pursue our discussions with the potential new owners of Scottish & Newcastle, the security of that workforce and the importance of retaining as many of its skills as possible in Scotland and the Scottish economy will be uppermost in our minds.

Climate Change

4. Nigel Don (North East Scotland) (SNP): To ask the First Minister what steps the Scottish Government is taking to ensure that Scotland plays its part in tackling climate change. (S3F-487)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): Earlier this week we launched a consultation on our proposed Scottish climate change bill. That is part of a key pledge in our manifesto to introduce a bill that will bind this and future Governments to reducing Scotland's emissions by 80 per cent by 2050. That is a hugely ambitious target, but climate change is a huge problem, not just for Scotland, but for the world as a whole.

Nigel Don: What steps will the Government be taking to ensure that we capitalise on the huge potential that the north-east has to contribute to Scotland's carbon reduction targets?

The First Minister: We have raised the target for the proportion of electricity to be generated in Scotland from renewable sources to 50 per cent by 2020. We are making excellent progress towards meeting that target. Only last week, we sanctioned the development of a new wind farm development in Aberdeenshire. In total, the Government has sanctioned the development of seven new energy projects in Scotland in the past nine months, which is double the rate of approvals under the previous Administration. That is one reason why we are so confident that the Government will see Scotland achieving its full potential in energy resources.

The one black spot in the past few months was the Westminster Government's decision to delay development of the world-leading and potentially planet-saving pre-combustion Peterhead project, which has resulted in the project moving from the north-east of Scotland to Abu Dhabi. Would that we in Scotland had the power to ensure that we make best use of world-leading and potentially planet-saving technology that should be developed in this country.

David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): The First Minister will be aware that the main measure to mitigate climate change is renewable energy, as he said. Does he share my enthusiasm

for the proposal in the recent Crown Estate study to develop an offshore east coast transmission line to allow renewable energy to be distributed around and across the UK? Will Mr Salmond support the project, in the knowledge that it will provide ministers, in approving wind farm developments in island communities, with assured transmission capacity to meet climate change targets?

The First Minister: I approve of the Crown Estate's project. The energy division of the Scottish Government has worked on and supported such ideas, including through meetings with the European Commissioner for Energy that I have mentioned to Parliament previously.

The issue is important because there are two strategic problems that we must overcome to develop Scotland's full energy potential. First, we must reduce and then, I hope, eliminate discrimination in the charging regime for getting Scottish energy on to the grid. Grid access charges are discriminatory and unfair to Scotland. We are pursuing action to mitigate that unfairness, which is a drag on our energy potential.

The second problem is the one that David Stewart mentioned. Scotland has enormous energy potential. On electricity generation alone, we have the capacity to generate many times our own needs. One key factor is how we transport that electricity to areas of energy demand that are more energy poor than Scotland—not just south of the border, but also in continental Europe. The Crown Estate Commission's excellent study progresses what will be one of the key elements in developing Scotland's full energy potential—the idea of seaborne transmission, sometimes known as the supergrid.

Alison McInnes (North East Scotland) (LD): I am sure that the First Minister will want to acknowledge the excellent work on the environment and climate change that is done by the Scottish Crop Research Institute and the Macaulay Institute in the north-east region. Given the uncertainty that was created by his comments yesterday, what assurances can he give that the funding that allows the unique approach to tackling climate change at the Macaulay Institute, which harnesses a mix of environmental and social sciences to a strong understanding of the role of communities in bringing about change, will not become conditional on the two institutes merging?

The First Minister: The merger of the two institutes has been welcomed by the institutes and just about everyone else apart from Mike Rumbles. It is an important measure that will provide critical mass for the vital research that the two institutes, which are public bodies, pursue. I should have thought that Alison McInnes would join the Government—and informed opinion across the science sector—in welcoming a

substantial move that will enhance and improve not just the position of the two institutes, but Scotland's ability to contribute to the vital research to which I referred.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I welcome the consultation that was published this week, especially the fact that it does not close off the possibility that, ultimately, targets will need to be higher than the 80 per cent reduction in emissions that the Government currently proposes. The work of the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research, for example, indicates that higher targets will be urgently needed.

I ask why the document has nothing to say on sector-by-sector targets. Does the First Minister agree, for example, that if road and aviation traffic levels continue to grow at current rates, it will be impossible to meet even an 80 per cent target?

The First Minister: It is important that we tackle such matters in the round and maintain that binding 80 per cent target, which Patrick Harvie is correct to say is hugely ambitious. Increasingly, people are recognising internationally that action that was suggested by Governments previously is not adequate to deal with the problem. We in Scotland should also acknowledge occasionally that, although the potential is great, so too are the ambition and targets that we propose, which are significant international targets. I discussed that point yesterday with the European commissioner, who very much approves of the Scottish Government's approach and targets, both for regeneration and renewable energy in general, and the 80 per cent target in the proposed climate change bill.

Universities Concordat

5. Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab): To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Government's proposals to establish a concordat with universities will mean for higher education in Scotland. (S3F-480)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): Our universities compete efficiently with the best in the world and we are determined that that should continue. That means thinking boldly and imaginatively with the sector about how we address the challenges of our fast-changing world. The joint future thinking task force on universities gives us the means to do that and I anticipate that a concordat model will be one among a number of ideas that the task force will discuss.

Richard Baker: Will not the aspirations of the concordat require funding? The additional funding of £10 million that has been announced by the media will leave universities £10 million short in meeting pay agreements alone, which will open a gap between them and institutions south of the

border. No concordat can make up for the Scottish Government's hand-to-mouth funding for such drivers of our economy. Rather than the current task force, surely a full independent review of higher education funding must now be called.

The First Minister: Of course, it was the universities themselves that approved the task force and its ability to reach quick conclusions as opposed to having a review that could have extended over some considerable time.

I do not have to remind Richard Baker of the £100 million of additional capital investment that the Government injected this year into our college and university sector; I do not have to remind him that over the course of the comprehensive spending review investment in the higher education sector is increasing in real terms; and I am sure that he wants to welcome the additional £10 million that was so widely welcomed throughout the universities sector over the past week.

Richard Baker has been known to be far-seeing for many years. I particularly liked it when he said:

"We are very hopeful that fees will be scrapped."

Unfortunately, he did not say that as an MSP; he said it as a student leader on 11 September 1999.

Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP): Can I point out to—[*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Order.

Alex Neil: I point out to the First Minister that, after 10 years of Labour Governments in London and Edinburgh, the chances of a young person from a poor background in Scotland getting to university are no higher today than they were 10 years ago. I ask the First Minister whether the concordat will address Labour's miserable record on that issue.

The First Minister: Yes, indeed. Access to universities and colleges is one of this Government's key approaches to allowing working-class Scots to have their birthright of access to an education system that is free in the Scottish tradition, as opposed to having tuition fees in the Labour and Liberal tradition.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I welcome the proposal in the concordat to give universities greater freedom, not least because we first read about it in last May's Scottish Conservative manifesto. Does the First Minister acknowledge the key concerns about the funding of our universities, not just today, but from 2010 onwards in particular? That makes the case precisely for why we should have an independently chaired review of university funding to address all such issues and ensure that our institutions do not lose their competitive edge.

The First Minister: I suppose that, for Murdo Fraser, one of the great aspects of giving the university sector more independence—which is part of the concordat that it has so enthusiastically embraced—is that we pay attention to what it says. Given that our universities have welcomed the task force and rejected his commission report, I wonder whether Mr Fraser will follow his own logic, recognise the sector's independence, acknowledge the value of its advice and, like the Government, accept it.

National Health Service (Fraud)

6. Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): To ask the First Minister what the known extent is of fraud in the national health service. (S3F-473)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): It is estimated that up to 1 per cent of the NHS budget could be lost to fraud each year. Annual losses might be between £50 million and £100 million.

Mary Scanlon: First, I thank Alex Neil for reminding us how much better life was for students under the Tories.

Given the fact that an estimated £100 million is filtered out of the NHS each year by fraud, is the First Minister concerned that only 135 charges have been reported to the procurator fiscal, with a paltry three convictions?

The First Minister: I agree that any fraud against the NHS is unacceptable. Last Monday we launched a new zero-tolerance initiative to tackle the growing problem, over which I am sure Parliament will unite in effective action. That initiative is only part of the reason why there has been a 20 per cent surge in confidence and trust in the governance of Scotland since this Administration took office.

12:31

Meeting suspended until 14:15.

14:15

On resuming—

Question Time

SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

Finance and Sustainable Growth

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): Good afternoon. We have a single theme for themed question time this afternoon: finance and sustainable growth.

Public-private Partnerships (Alternatives)

1. Gil Paterson (West of Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what progress has been made in formulating an alternative funding mechanism to public-private partnerships. (S3O-2088)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): The Scottish futures trust is our alternative funding mechanism to the standard private finance initiative. It will deliver better, more efficient infrastructure for taxpayers. A consultation paper on the SFT was launched in December 2007, with responses due by 14 March. Work on the development of the Scottish futures trust is continuing and is making good progress.

Gil Paterson: The pitfalls of PFI and PPP are well documented. The sooner they go, the better. Could the cabinet secretary assure me that the new scheme will place emphasis on community needs and that the buildings, infrastructure and services that will be paid for by the public will be for their benefit, rather than for the benefit of the contractors or their shareholders?

John Swinney: Mr Paterson will know the position of the Government. We are keen to ensure that the Scottish futures trust develops a programme to deliver a better deal for taxpayers, by combining the opportunities for maximising investment levels and for reducing costs. As part of its design, we must take into account the fact that many PFI structures that have been established, particularly on the schools estate, make securing community access difficult. We certainly want to ensure that community access to important public facilities is maximised under the Scottish futures trust proposals.

Andy Kerr (East Kilbride) (Lab): Mr Paterson might want to extend his reading list on the so-called alternative to PPP. Perhaps he might go so far as to read the Unison document that says that the Scottish Government's proposal is simply PPP/PFI by another name. It still raises funds from bonds, commercial banks and private investors,

and profit is still made. The Government has simply put a gloss on that model. Would the minister care to be more honest about what he said in paragraph 7.2 of the consultation document, where he stated that the Government would be more "pragmatic"? Has the Government not accepted the model of PPP and tried to rebadge it?

John Swinney: What the Government has done since the election has indeed been pragmatic. The Government took the view that it would not be wise to terminate programmes or projects that we inherited from the previous Administration and that had already undergone significant development, and to replace them with alternatives. A great deal of work has been undertaken and cost incurred on some projects.

The Scottish futures trust is a model that will maximise the benefit for taxpayers and minimise the costs to them, in contrast to some of the elaborate and expensive arrangements that have been put in place. Securing greater value for the taxpayer lies at the heart of the Scottish futures trust. We will be happy to defend that approach to Parliament and to Scotland more widely.

Air Routes

2. John Scott (Ayr) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what contact it has had with Scottish airport operators and airlines regarding the development of new international air routes following the ending of the route development fund for direct flights to and from Scottish airports. (S3O-2065)

The Presiding Officer: I understand that the minister has damaged his back. I am sure that the Parliament will be understanding if he is not able to stand up.

The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): It is all right—I am managing to stand so far, Presiding Officer.

We have regular contact with airport operators and airlines at ministerial and official levels on issues of mutual interest, including that of improving Scotland's international connectivity.

John Scott: In answer to a previous parliamentary question, the Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change confirmed:

"The Scottish Executive's Route Development Fund has contributed substantially to the growth of direct international air routes to and from Scotland."—[*Official Report, Written Answers*, 17 July 2007; S3W-1844.]

In answer to another question, he stated:

"An evaluation of the economic benefits arising from the Route Development Fund (RDF) will be carried out".—

[*Official Report, Written Answers*, 20 July 2007; S3W-1845.]

Scotland's airports are key to growing our economy and establishing connectivity to our international markets. The routes that were previously created by the fund are also key routes for facilitating migrant workers' access to our economy—

The Presiding Officer: Could we have a question, please?

John Scott: They contribute to population growth and increased participation rates in the Scottish labour market. Given that the cabinet secretary has said—

The Presiding Officer: Question, please, Mr Scott.

John Scott: I am coming to it, sir. Given that the cabinet secretary has said that the route development fund is not to be reinstated, what measures is the minister prepared to take to support the continuing development of Prestwick airport, which is so vital to the Ayrshire economy?

Stewart Stevenson: The member makes an interesting contribution. The development fund has been valuable, although it is worth noting that many of the Ryanair routes that are successfully operating out of Prestwick airport have not had support from it. The market is increasingly delivering without the interventions from ministers that there have been in the past.

We welcome engagement with airlines and airport operators to ensure that we are addressing the climate change agenda through more efficient aircraft and new modes of operating. That is an increasingly important part of our focus as well.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): The minister will recognise the potential of Wick airport for the development of new international air routes. Does he agree that, in addition to the prospect of increased business usage of the airport as replacement industry and commerce are established while Dounreay continues to decommission, the northern North Sea and west of Shetland oil sectors present future opportunities for flights between Wick and Bergen and Haugesund—I hope that I have pronounced that correctly—in Norway and for helicopter movements between the northernmost airport on the Scottish mainland and marine oil and gas installations?

Stewart Stevenson: One of my few air journeys was to Wick, and coincidentally I spent my honeymoon in the 1960s in Haugesund, so the member has managed to press all the right buttons for me.

Wick airport has a number of particular advantages. It supports an area that is lacking in mainstream rapid communication, so it is very important. As part of my work, I have looked at whether it might be a suitable area for developing new approach facilities with the Civil Aviation Authority, using global positioning systems technology. That would increase the accessibility of Wick and reduce the number of diversions. We will continue to pay close attention to the development of Wick airport.

Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab): Perhaps the contortions that the minister undertook this morning in the transport debate have contributed to his bad back.

Andy Kerr (East Kilbride) (Lab): Or was it his honeymoon?

Des McNulty: That was a long time ago.

Before the Government took the decision on the ending of the route development fund, did it consult the international experts who the First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth were so keen to highlight would be involved in all decisions that contributed to Scotland's prosperity? If so, what did they say?

Stewart Stevenson: The member, who was a minister in the previous Administration, will be well aware that the change in the status of route development support derived from decisions by the European Union in 2005. It is now possible to provide support only if the airports at both ends of the route have fewer than 5 million passengers per annum. Furthermore, we can support only routes within the EU, and we cannot assist non-EU carriers. That restricts the fund to the extent that the market is a much more effective way of ensuring that Scotland's economy continues to be supported by the development of new routes—and that is what is happening successfully today.

The Presiding Officer: I hope that the number of supplementary questions has helped the minister to stand up and sit down enough to ease his back.

Single Status Pay Agreements (Costs)

4. David McLetchie (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive what its latest estimate is of the cost to councils of implementing single status pay agreements and meeting equal pay claims. (S3O-2060)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): The cost and implementation of single status agreements and meeting equal pay claims are matters for individual local authorities.

David McLetchie: I am astonished by that complacent answer from the cabinet secretary,

who normally likes to cultivate the prudential image of an Aberfeldy bank manager. He seems somewhat blasé about the potential liabilities facing our councils.

The cabinet secretary will be aware that, two years ago, following an investigation by the Parliament's Finance Committee—of which he was then a member—the cost of funding equal pay compensation was estimated at between £310 million and £560 million. Two years later, we are not a great deal further forward. How can the cabinet secretary's financial settlement for local authorities over the next three years be regarded as in any way sustainable when they face huge, unbudgeted liabilities that could blow his proposed council tax freeze out of the water?

John Swinney: I assure Mr McLetchie that no one is blasé on this side of the chamber.

I fully respect the right of local authorities to operate as independent financial entities. Local authorities must be in a position to manage their own resources and to manage the issues that they need to address. As Mr McLetchie well knows, some local authorities have resolved the equal pay and single status issues whereas others have not. By virtue of the fact that some local authorities have been able to resolve the issues, it is clear that they can be resolved. I want to treat local authorities with respect and allow them to resolve the issues.

Mr McLetchie will not need to wait much longer to find out the reaction of Scotland's local authorities to the Government's approach to the council tax. We will perhaps soon have an answer to his question on what stance councils will take on the council tax freeze.

Bob Doris (Glasgow) (SNP): Is the cabinet secretary aware that in 1993 the Conservative Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment, Miss Ann Widdecombe, messed up a Government review of equal pay gloriously by including a retrospective limit of only two years in the Sex Discrimination and Equal Pay (Remedies) Regulations 1993? Does he agree with Unison's submission to the Finance Committee's review of single status agreements that that

"seriously undermined the ability of local government employers and trade unions to accurately project the costs of equal pay during single status negotiations in 1999"?

Does he further agree that any additional financial support to local authorities for equal pay should come from south of the border and that we should look to successive incompetent United Kingdom Governments to pick up the bill?

John Swinney: Presiding Officer, this has been a fascinating afternoon. We have had a reminder of Mr Stevenson's honeymoon and a reminder of

Ann Widdecombe. Heaven knows what is coming next.

Obviously, there have been long-running problems in resolving the issues of equal pay. The Government's stance is to encourage local authorities and trade unions to make progress on resolving the issues. Clearly, if resources can be made available through the UK Government to support the settlement of equal pay and single status claims, the Scottish Government will not stand in the way of any such generosity.

Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab): At a recent meeting of the Scottish women's budget group that both the cabinet secretary and I attended, the point was made that some local authorities that had reached agreement and paid out in settlement of single status claims were now facing, for a second time round, further claims for a subsequent period. Will he take account of the fact that asking ratepayers and council tax payers to pay twice for the same deal is fundamentally unsatisfactory? We cannot ask people to keep paying for claims that are not properly resolved. Does he recognise that the Scottish Government has a responsibility for ensuring that the interests of council tax payers are properly protected and that the claims are dealt with properly?

John Swinney: As I said to Mr McLetchie, local authorities are independent institutions and are therefore able to manage their own resources. I say that to put on record that I think that it is for local authorities, trade unions and employees to resolve the issues. Having said that, I think that Mr McNulty makes a fair point. If the issues are to be resolved at local authority level, they should be resolved on one occasion and in a fashion that does not expose the authority to further claims at a later date. For example, there is no point in sorting out the equal pay element and not sorting out the single status element, because that will simply create a problem that will return as a burden on council tax payers. I encourage those who are attempting to resolve the issues to bear that in mind.

Capital Funding (Edinburgh)

5. Sarah Boyack (Edinburgh Central) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what further discussions it plans to have with City of Edinburgh Council regarding capital funding. (S3O-2114)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): The Government is providing record levels of investment for local government, including support for capital infrastructure projects, in the forthcoming local government finance settlement. I have accepted the need to look further at the additional pressures on Edinburgh as Scotland's

capital city. The results of a study on that will be discussed with the council when they become available.

Sarah Boyack: Is the minister aware that the Scottish National Party-Liberal Democrat council believes that it now faces a £20 million increase in the cost of the third wave of the schools programme for Edinburgh, which the SNP promised during the election campaign that it would match brick by brick? In his review, will he commit to looking seriously at what the council's education leader has called a "last ditch" attempt to persuade the Government that the situation in Edinburgh is desperate? Will he accept that, without Scottish Government help, Edinburgh simply will not get the new schools that we desperately need?

John Swinney: I assure Sarah Boyack that the Government engages in regular discussions with the City of Edinburgh Council. We take seriously the issues that local authorities raise with us. I am quite sure that there will be further discussions on the point. I had a fruitful and productive meeting with the leader of the council just before Christmas, and I am sure that we will have other opportunities to address the points that Sarah Boyack made. It is very important to sustain investment in our school infrastructure. The Government is contributing formidably with a significant increase of 13 per cent in the capital expenditure that is available to local authorities in the coming financial year. That will contribute significantly to tackling some of those issues and demands.

Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind): The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth knows that I am thinking, "So far, so good," about the capital city supplement. However, I urge him to take on board the question that Sarah Boyack asked and which I am going to repeat. Will he match, brick for brick, the cost of building new schools in Edinburgh? The situation is as serious as that.

John Swinney: The Government has made significant resources available to local authorities. I made the point that we have put into the system a 13 per cent increase in capital budgets for local authorities in the current financial year. Of course, we will continue to have discussions with the City of Edinburgh Council, during which ministers will address issues of concern to the council.

Textile Industry (Borders)

6. John Lamont (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive what it is doing to help the textile industry in the Scottish Borders. (S3O-2059)

The Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism (Jim Mather): Scottish ministers provide a wide range of support to the textile industry throughout Scotland, including the Borders, through the enterprise networks, Scottish Development International and regional selective assistance, which is our national scheme of financial assistance to industry. In addition, we held a lengthy consultation session with senior members of the textile sector in November. The textile team in Scottish Enterprise works closely with the industry to raise its profile, to forge collaborative links in complementary technologies, to support skill development and to deliver the national textile industry strategy "Scotland at the cutting edge: a strategy for the textiles industry in Scotland 2007-2010". In addition, textile companies can rely on a broad range of business support services that are offered by Scottish Enterprise Borders through the business gateway and the account management mechanism. Our Scottish manufacturing advisory service also delivers specialist advice to manufacturing companies Scotland-wide.

John Lamont: The minister will be aware of the proud tradition of textiles in the Borders and of the challenges that the industry has faced in recent years. Indeed, in the past few months, there have been significant job cuts in a number of mills across the region, including at Pringle of Scotland in Hawick. What does the Scottish Government intend to do to protect Scottish textile firms from overseas firms that are often able to dramatically undercut our industry while giving the impression that they are producing Scottish goods?

Jim Mather: We are working more closely than ever with the industry. Last week, I had a meeting with representatives of the industry and some Chinese consultants that the industry brought here. They were reinforcing the goal set by the industry at the consultation session, which was essentially about making the industry stand tall in Scotland, making it carve out a niche in the luxury goods market, and protecting current employment. All of that will be further fulfilled when we have our second meeting with the textile sector.

I make an offer to the member. If there is sufficient appetite in the Borders to bring together the textile companies with the local authority, Scottish Enterprise and SDI, I will be more than happy to engage at that level and do the same as we have done in North Ayrshire and my constituency to focus on the sector in situ and further differentiate it from that locus.

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): Those are encouraging words from the minister, but they come too late not only for the Pringle workers but for those at J Barbour and Sons in Galashiels, where many jobs were lost recently. Will the minister's officials enter into

discussions with Scottish Enterprise to determine whether some of the public funding that Barbour received can be retrieved? Does he share my concern over the company delaying contact with Government and enterprise agencies? Given that it did not make contact before announcing the closure, will he ask his officials to determine whether, if the company had sought help at an earlier stage, support could have been made available to it to avoid the job losses?

Jim Mather: I agree with the member's description of the impact of the job losses. Coming from a rural constituency, I know the enormous impact on a rural area of the loss of 46 jobs. I will commit to looking at the retrieval potential and to looking again at what more we can do to move things forward. I repeat the offer that I made to John Lamont of a focused session in the Borders on the issue, the aim of which is to bring together hearts and minds and identify all the stakeholders that contribute to the sector.

When we ran the session for the electronics sector, we heard of their appetite to have suppliers and customers in the room, too. They said that that could square the circle of trying to identify the best way of moving forward. My big sadness is to see Scottish companies go when all that may have been required was further innovation and a little bit more courage. The message from the Chinese consultants was that the luxury market out there, which includes an appetite for Scottish goods, has yet to be sated. We should be satisfying that appetite.

Efficiency Savings

7. Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what progress has been made in identifying efficiency savings in the budget. (S3O-2121)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): We are making good progress in identifying efficiency savings across portfolios and will publish our efficiency delivery plans by the end of March 2008.

Patricia Ferguson: Will the cabinet secretary assure me that the savings will be used not to balance the budget, but to expand front-line services, as happened under the previous Labour-Liberal Democrat Executive?

John Swinney: The purpose of the efficiency programme is to ensure that we can invest the greatest possible proportion of resources in front-line services. I think that everyone believes that there is an opportunity to improve the efficiency and design of public services to achieve more from the resources that are available to us. I reassure Patricia Ferguson on that. The Government's objective for its efficiency programme is to ensure that we expand

investment in front-line services. I am glad that that commands support across the chamber.

Quangos

8. George Foulkes (Lothians) (Lab): Given yesterday's statement, I may be able to anticipate the answer, but I will put the question nonetheless.

To ask the Scottish Executive what progress it has made towards its objective of a 25 per cent reduction in the number of quangos. (S3O-2122)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): My recollection is that a statement was made to Parliament yesterday by the First Minister in which he set out how the Scottish Government will exceed our 25 per cent target and bring the number of national public organisations to around 120 in 2011, which is the lowest number since devolution.

George Foulkes: I am overwhelmed that all my written questions and this oral question elicited yesterday's statement. I am only sorry that the finance secretary was gazumped by someone else making it.

I will not repeat all the political arguments that were made yesterday and which have been repeated today. I return to the question that Des McNulty raised yesterday. I am genuinely concerned that putting the Mobility and Access Committee for Scotland together with the Public Transport Users Committee for Scotland will reduce the power and effectiveness of disabled representation. Yesterday, the First Minister said that the Public Transport Users Committee can recommend, whereas MACS can only advise. I cannot see the practical difference between advising and recommending.

The Presiding Officer: Question please.

George Foulkes: I hope that the finance secretary will think again about the issue, or at least say that he will have another look at it, to ensure that the interests of disabled passengers are not overlooked.

John Swinney: The Government's intention in relation to access to public transport will most definitely not result in the interests of disabled people being overlooked in any way. We want to ensure that we have an effective channel of communication for all transport users so that we can hear clearly and directly in the round the input from disabled people.

I give George Foulkes the assurance in all seriousness that the Government is determined to ensure that effective channels of communication are in place so that we can hear the concerns and aspirations of disabled people in relation to access to public transport. We are putting in place a more effective channel of communication that will give a

more decisive voice to people with disabilities. When designing the arrangements in the period ahead, we will bear in mind the concerns that George Foulkes has expressed and that Mr McNulty expressed yesterday.

Gavin Brown (Lothians) (Con): Can the cabinet secretary answer a question that the First Minister dodged earlier today? What percentage reduction in cost will there be for taxpayers as a result of the reduction in the number of quangos?

John Swinney: Earlier today I was sitting beside the First Minister, who answered the question that he was asked simply and clearly. He said that the reduction in the number of quangos is part of the Government's programme, which is designed to deliver 2 per cent efficiency savings across the board. He identified a saving of about £25 million from the measures that we are putting in place. That is the clearest possible answer that Mr Brown could be looking for on how the initiative fits into the Government's wider programme of delivering a more efficient and simpler structure of government in Scotland. I assume that that aspiration is shared by members from all parties.

David McLetchie (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con): My question relates to the First Minister's camouflage of the quangos that we heard about this morning and to his announcement of a policy of no compulsory redundancies. Will the cabinet secretary confirm that the Scottish Government's policy of no compulsory redundancies did not apply to Mr Dougie Donnelly?

John Swinney: My honest opinion is that Mr McLetchie's question needed a bit of camouflage. We have been around these houses before, and we will probably have to go around them a few more times. We are merging two organisations, with two chairs, into one. There is a requirement to provide one chair for the organisation to take it forward. The Government has taken a sensible, pragmatic approach to that change. I should have thought that sensible, pragmatic measures would have appealed to Mr McLetchie, of all people.

Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab): I draw the cabinet secretary's attention to the way in which the Scottish Arts Council and Scottish Screen are being merged to form a new organisation, creative Scotland. The process did not require either of the chairs of the two predecessor bodies to be sacked. The method is working well, and I recommend it to the cabinet secretary. Is he aware of that way of doing things?

John Swinney: I hear the example that Patricia Ferguson cites, but the Government is taking a fresh approach to the issue of sport. We are drawing together sportscotland and the Scottish Institute of Sport to provide a comprehensive, clear approach to the development of sport in

Scotland and are putting together the leadership arrangements to make that happen.

Budget 2008-09 (Policy Priorities)

9. James Kelly (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what its policy priorities are for the 2008-09 budget. (S3O-2130)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): Our policy priorities for the 2008-09 budget are set out in our spending review. In preparing the budget, the Government has remained focused on achieving its central purpose—to create a more successful country, with opportunities for all of Scotland to flourish, through increasing sustainable economic growth.

James Kelly: Given the importance of the completion of the M74 to the west of Scotland economy and to my constituents in Cambuslang and Rutherglen in particular, and given the M74's strategic importance to the 2014 Commonwealth games, will the cabinet secretary confirm that the budget will include spending to formalise tenders for the project, so that it can be completed by 2011?

John Swinney: The Government is absolutely committed to the completion of the M74. We are currently examining the tender for the contract, in association with Glasgow City Council and other local authorities that are partners in the project. Decisions will be taken in due course. The issue will be resolved in the context of the spending settlement that the Government has announced.

Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP): I draw the cabinet secretary's attention to one of the budget priorities—that of reducing fuel poverty in Scotland—and point out to him that, as a result of the recent energy price increases, the additional VAT revenue obtained by the Treasury next year will be around £175 million. Will he urge the United Kingdom Government to use that money—and to give us our share of it—to address the increasing problem of fuel poverty that has resulted from the energy price increases?

John Swinney: Bearing in mind the significant increases in the cost of fuel and the impact that they have had on household energy prices, it is clear that fuel poverty is a significant problem. Mr Neil can be assured that this Government will do everything in its power to ensure that Scotland benefits from resources to which we are entitled. As the First Minister simply pointed out at First Minister's question time, Scotland generates significant resources for the United Kingdom for which we receive not a penny. Scotland should benefit from its natural resources—that is long overdue.

Environmental and Ethical Schemes (Business)

10. Bill Wilson (West of Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it is aware of Scottish, United Kingdom, European and international schemes and awards designed to recognise or support businesses that achieve excellence with regard to environmental and ethical criteria, such as the CommunityMark programme of Scottish Business in the Community and the green tourism business scheme. (S3O-2093)

The Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism (Jim Mather): I am aware of a wide range of schemes and awards, including CommunityMark; the green tourism business scheme; vision in business for the environment of Scotland; the Carbon Trust's low-carbon building award; and environmental management systems. I encourage Scottish companies to seek suitable recognition in those areas. The Scottish Government welcomes activities that seek to raise awareness and understanding in the business community through the promotion and recognition of best practice in order to encourage action.

Bill Wilson: Will the Scottish Government consider varying business rates according to companies' performance, as measured by some or all of the criteria that have been adopted by those schemes and awards—for example, by rewarding companies for complying with the Government's objective of reducing greenhouse gas production?

Jim Mather: That is an interesting idea, but on the table at the moment are pragmatic reasons why measures such as the green tourism award allow Scottish businesses to appeal to the discerning visitor, create a climate for repeat and regular visits, lower costs and increase margins and turnovers. Such incentives are in place as part of an effective market and I am keen for them to have more publicity so that more people want to take part in them and see the advantages of doing so.

Police Pensions (Additional Funding)

11. Pauline McNeill (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive whether additional funding will be allocated by the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth under the spending review to meet police pension liability over the next three years. (S3O-2141)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): In my statement to Parliament on 13 December, I stated that funding for police pensions is included in the local authority funding settlement. It is for police boards to negotiate budgets with their constituent

local authorities. Indeed, there was a positive meeting last week with ministers and representatives of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland and police board conveners at which police pensions were discussed. The meeting confirmed that it is for councils, police authorities and chief constables to address pensions pressures.

Pauline McNeill: Is the cabinet secretary aware that in year 2 of the spending review, the shortfall in police pensions in Strathclyde—the largest police board area—is £27 million, which Strathclyde Police has described as “problematic” for the police budget if it is not resolved?

Will the cabinet secretary confirm that that figure for year 2 is correct? Will he also confirm today that the Government will live up to its responsibility for police pensions? Does he accept that, if we do not resolve the problem of the shortfall in police pensions, which is £50 million over three years for Strathclyde, it will definitely eat into the police operational budget and affect the ability to recruit new officers?

John Swinney: All I can say to Pauline McNeill is what I said in my earlier answer. I made it clear in my statement on 13 December that funding for police pensions is included in the local authority funding settlement.

On our approach to the matter, the payment of pension liability is a statutory duty on police authorities. The Government has put resources into the local authority funding settlement to allow for that to be undertaken. The issue can be most effectively pursued by doing what the Cabinet Secretary for Justice and I are doing and encouraging dialogue involving local authorities, police authorities and chief constables to ensure that we get a well worked out and sustainable approach to supporting our police service in all the challenges that it faces. That is what this Government is determined to do.

Additional Funding (Edinburgh)

12. Ian McKee (Lothians) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what progress is being made in discussions regarding the allocation of additional funding for public services and affordable housing in the city of Edinburgh. (S3O-2085)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): For 2008-09, Edinburgh has been allocated nearly £8 million through the open market shared equity pilot scheme to assist first-time buyers. The city's allocation from the affordable housing investment programme will be announced in due course. I have also accepted the need to look further at the additional pressures on Edinburgh as Scotland's

capital city, and a study on that subject is under way.

Ian McKee: Last week, the cabinet secretary resisted the temptation offered by the Liberal Democrats to say the wrong three words to Margo MacDonald and instead promised a capital city supplement for Edinburgh. In view of the urgent need, will he not only keep that promise under continuing review but consider further measures to tackle the severe shortage of affordable housing in the city?

John Swinney: As I said in my first response, the allocation of support for Edinburgh through the affordable housing investment programme will be announced in due course. I have made an announcement about the capital city supplement for Edinburgh, and I gave the chamber the commitment that a study on that issue, which is now under way, will be completed in time to allow me to make provision for such a supplement in the 2009-10 budget. I will most definitely keep that commitment when I come back to Parliament with the budget settlement for the next financial year.

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab): Does the cabinet secretary realise that, according to Professor Bramley's housing needs assessment, which was commissioned by the Scottish Government, the positive net need for affordable housing in Edinburgh is five times that of any other local authority in Scotland and that although resources for Edinburgh are twice what they were three years ago, they are still well below the per capita Scottish average? Will he take action significantly to increase housing resources to Edinburgh to meet homelessness targets as well as Edinburgh's wider social and economic needs?

John Swinney: As well as delivering the largest local authority settlement ever in Scotland, the Government is making an allocation to the City of Edinburgh Council from the affordable housing investment programme and is taking other measures to support the capital city. I say to Mr Chisholm that Edinburgh's affordable housing problems have not simply come along in the past eight months; they have been bubbling away for a number of years, utterly unattended to by the previous Administration. This Government will do its level best to tackle those issues in the months to come.

Council Tax Regulations

13. Michael Matheson (Falkirk West) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it has any plans to review existing council tax regulations. (S3O-2084)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): Having made clear our intention to abolish the council tax and replace it with a fairer local tax that is based on ability to pay, we are focusing our efforts on that rather than on changes to the council tax regulations.

Michael Matheson: I draw the minister's attention to the experience of two of my constituents who were notified a couple of months ago by the local assessor's office that their property, bought two years previously, should have been rebanded at the time of purchase but, due to an administrative error by the assessor's office, had not been. Now that the property has been moved up a band, the assessor's office has applied the rebanding retrospectively to the past two years and is holding my constituents financially liable, stating that there is no provision in the relevant regulations to waive the liability. Will the minister look into the issue to ensure that mistakes by the assessor's office are not held against constituents who simply did what they should have done and paid what they believed at the time to be the correct council tax?

John Swinney: Mr Matheson makes a fair point. If he will provide me with details of the case, I will most certainly look into it and try to identify whether any provision in the regulations will enable us to tackle the problem.

Derek Brownlee (South of Scotland) (Con): Given that the new leader of the United Kingdom Liberal Democrats has made it clear that the Scottish party will not be allowed to support the Scottish National Party's local income tax proposal because it would be a fixed rate, would it not make more sense, pragmatically, for the Government to consider the regulations on council tax and to work with the Labour Party, the Conservative party and others to consider how we can make the council tax fairer, rather than go off on some hare-brained scheme that will not even attract parliamentary support? [*Interruption.*]

John Swinney: I see that Margaret Curran has arrived in the chamber—suitably noisily, I must say. It is always a pleasure to work with the Labour Party when Margaret Curran is involved, and to work with the Conservative party into the bargain. Despite my avid reading of the newspapers, I had not picked up the fact that the Liberal Democrats have received fresh orders from London. In fact, I have not heard anything much from the Liberal Democrats for a considerable time. I used to hear a lot more from them when Sir Menzies Campbell was the leader, but now that there is a new regime, we do not hear anything about them.

I believe firmly that we should move from the council tax to a local income tax. I am absolutely

delighted that we had in-principle endorsement from Parliament for such a step, which will deliver fairness and equity to the population. I look forward to Mr Brownlee having a conversion to the cause in the next few weeks.

Poverty

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): The next item of business is a debate on motion S3M-1260, in the name of Nicola Sturgeon, on poverty. As we are fairly constrained for time, I will hold members to the time limits, certainly in the initial stages.

14:57

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon): I apologise for the fragility of my voice. I know that it will be a matter of great distress to the Opposition parties that I am struggling to speak, but I will do my best to get through the debate.

I am pleased to bring to Parliament a debate that goes to the very heart of the kind of Scotland that we want to be. I am sure that all of us, whatever our political persuasion and despite our political disagreements, agree on the vital importance of tackling the poverty, inequality and deprivation that have held back our country for too long. As we debate the issue, almost one in five of our fellow Scots—almost 900,000 citizens—live in poverty. That is unacceptable. It is a tragedy that we cannot tolerate and it is why making poverty history in Scotland will be the core of everything our Government does.

Last November, we published our spending plans and “The Government Economic Strategy”, which are the twin pillars of a new age of ambition in Scotland. Together, they provide the strategy and the measures that will put Scotland firmly on course for success and ensure that we can deliver our overarching purpose of increasing sustainable economic growth. Addressing decades of economic underperformance requires a fresh approach. It means acknowledging that business and people, not just Governments, drive economic growth. Our history and our instincts tell us that Scotland’s people are our greatest asset, which is why people are at the heart of our approach.

We look to neighbours such as Denmark, Sweden, Finland and Norway. All of those small independent countries are wealthier than the United Kingdom and have lower levels of poverty and inequality than the UK has. Their experiences tell us that Scotland will do well and reach its full potential only when more Scots do well. It is vital that we grow the economy and release Scotland’s entrepreneurial and creative talents, but that is not enough—we must also share increased prosperity and ensure that all in Scotland can flourish. That is why one of our first steps has been to set tough national targets to ensure that economic growth is shared fairly among the people of Scotland.

By 2017, we want to increase overall income, and the proportion of that income that is earned by the lowest 30 per cent of earners in the country. Also by 2017, we want to narrow the gap in participation between Scotland's best and worst performing regions.

Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): The cabinet secretary talks about setting tough targets for 2017, but no figures appear to be attached to them, whether represented as a percentage or as the amount of success required in a general area. Will she elaborate on how the targets will be benchmarked or measured?

Nicola Sturgeon: Robert Brown makes a fair point. In the strategic framework that we will develop from this discussion, we will have to ensure that we can measure our progress on targets. The targets are long-term targets—they have to be, given the magnitude of the challenge—but by working consistently and measurably towards them, we will make real inroads into the income and regional inequalities that have held Scotland back for too long.

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab): For clarity, will Nicola Sturgeon explain why such an emphasis is now placed on the solidarity golden rule and why a dismissive remark has been made about the internationally recognised definition of poverty? The internationally accepted standard for poverty income is technically defined as income that is less than 60 per cent of the United Kingdom median income. Why has there been a shift?

Nicola Sturgeon: It is important to stress that the standard definition of poverty remains, but we are making absolutely clear our determination to meet our solidarity and cohesion golden rules so that we close the gap between the richest and poorest in our society. I would have thought that Labour members would find it in themselves to approve of that. Clearly, things have indeed moved on under new Labour.

Margaret Curran (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab): Will the minister take an intervention?

Nicola Sturgeon: I have to make some progress; I will perhaps take an intervention later.

Tackling poverty does not just make practical sense; we also have a moral responsibility to make Scotland wealthier and fairer. We bear that moral responsibility most of all to children. That is why this Government remains committed to halving child poverty by 2010 and eradicating it by 2020. Although there is no doubt whatsoever that independence for Scotland would give us many more levers to meet that target, we will in the meantime work with the United Kingdom Government and use all our devolved powers to try to achieve it.

Today we are issuing a discussion paper that is designed to spark debate among stakeholders across Scotland and generate a dialogue to inform the way forward. We want to hear the views not only of those who work in the poverty field but of people who are themselves in poverty, so that our approach to these issues can be grounded firmly in what they tell us. We will be proud to lead the discussion with our partners in the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and the Poverty Alliance—groups that are, to quote Labour's amendment, "experienced in tackling poverty". The discussion will allow us to develop a strategic framework for tackling poverty, inequality and deprivation.

The framework will replace the closing the opportunity gap approach, on which we are today making available an evaluation report, but that does not mean that we want to throw out all that went before simply for the sake of change—far from it. Yes, we must identify where fresh approaches are needed, but we remain supportive of what has been working and is still working.

We all know that poverty is about much more than low income. It is about being excluded from a range of opportunities to lead a fulfilling life, about being unable to lead a healthy life, about being unable to realise one's potential through education and skills, about being unable to get into sustained quality work and, all too often, about being unable even to have a place called home.

Often, poverty is compounded by a lack of basic social skills and by the problems that are created by living in fractured, deprived communities that may be unsafe, lacking in services and lacking most of all in hope. Our approach will recognise that poverty cannot be sorted by the Government alone or by any quick or simple formula, but it is important that the Government does not make matters worse. Labour's amendment talks about the need to help "the poorest households". I agree, but I encourage Labour members to reflect on the fact that the UK Labour Government's decision to scrap the 10 per cent starting rate of tax penalises all but the richest 30 per cent of people. That is the Labour record on tackling poverty.

We need to break down structural and cultural barriers and equip vulnerable individuals with the resilience and strength to overcome them. We want first and foremost to tackle the root causes of poverty through early intervention and prevention in areas such as education, health and employment, but we also need, through offering more responsive public services, to help those who are already in poverty get out of poverty—and we need to alleviate the impact of poverty on people's lives. We will consider what actions need to be taken in all those areas.

One way in which we will seek to maximise incomes is by promoting increased benefits take-up—which I am pleased to see is called for in the Tory amendment. That is particularly important for pensioners, who cannot lift themselves out of poverty through work alone.

Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): Will Nicola Sturgeon give way?

Nicola Sturgeon: I have to make some progress just now.

I am pleased to announce that we will work with the Department for Work and Pensions to launch in the spring of this year a pilot project that will be aimed at maximising benefit income for the one older person in three who, under Labour, did not claim the benefits to which they were entitled.

Of course, even the best strategy will count for nothing if it is not followed through by delivery on the ground, so our framework will articulate how national policy must connect with local delivery. The single outcome agreements and our new relationship with local government, established through the concordat with COSLA, will be central to delivery. That is a partnership of trust and mutual respect, focused on achieving sustained, shared outcomes that really change people's lives.

The commitment to delivery is backed by investment. The new fairer Scotland fund will provide £435 million over the next three years to help community planning partnerships tackle the poverty and deprivation that affect too many people throughout Scotland. It brings together seven individual funding streams, thereby reducing bureaucracy and simplifying the funding landscape for our partners.

Johann Lamont: Will Nicola Sturgeon give way?

Nicola Sturgeon: Not just now.

The fund will also support collective action across all community planning partners and act as a catalyst to mobilise mainstream budgets to help tackle the root causes of poverty and deprivation rather than leave us struggling to deal with the symptoms, as we have done all too often in the past. Early intervention, employability and skills will be key elements, building on positive achievements that have already been realised in many parts of Scotland under previous initiatives.

It is no secret that this Government believes passionately that only independence will give Scotland the full range of levers to tackle the deep-seated poverty, inequality and deprivation that scar our country. That is why, in the context of the national conversation on choosing Scotland's future, we will seek views on how constitutional change might help us to tackle poverty and create a fairer Scotland. In the meantime, we need to—

and will—do our job by using our existing powers to maximum effect, and we will work with the UK Government to ensure that its policies address Scotland's needs.

This debate is of the utmost importance to our vision for Scotland. How we fare on this issue, perhaps more than on any other, will help to define the kind of Scotland we build for the future and for future generations. I commend the motion to Parliament.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees that poverty, inequality and deprivation are among the greatest challenges to be faced in Scotland today, that tackling these challenges is core to the delivery of the Government Economic Strategy and that development of a framework for taking forward these aspects of the Government Economic Strategy will contribute to the creation of a fairer Scotland.

15:08

Margaret Curran (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab): I thank Nicola Sturgeon for bravely soldiering on despite her fragile voice. I suppose that members will be equally disappointed that there is no fragility in my voice this afternoon.

The Labour Party welcomes the debate very much. I cannot imagine that any members disagree with our view that the fight against poverty must remain a central plank of Government policy. The Parliament cannot afford ever to lose sight of the hardest pressed in our society. We must appreciate the harsh reality of people struggling to ensure that their children are not left behind all the other children and the truly human consequences of reinforced disadvantage in education, work and health.

The toll of disadvantage is borne not only by the individuals, families and communities involved; it is, of course, a key loss to the country's social and economic future. As many people have acknowledged—including, I think, the cabinet secretary in her speech—real and deep-seated change has followed Labour's unprecedented commitment to end child poverty within a generation. In Scotland, we met our target of reducing child poverty by a quarter. Indeed, by 2005, the proportion of children in relative poverty had fallen from one child in three to one child in four and we were on track to fulfil our promise to halve child poverty by 2010.

I listened to the cabinet secretary's response to Robert Brown. I hope that measuring progress on targets will be in the new framework that the Government is drawing up.

The number of pensioners who live in poverty has reduced from one in three to one in five. The number who live in absolute poverty has reduced from one in three to one in 20. Some would say

that that is not good enough. Many Scottish National Party members told us that when we were in power. I look forward to learning what the SNP's more ambitious targets will be.

Our targets were achieved following a programme of serious investment in child care, support for homeless people and action to tackle inequality and educational disadvantage.

I have had a little time to read the SNP document and the press reports on it. The cabinet secretary might pick up on this, but we are entitled to ask a number of significant questions about the fresh approach that we have been promised by this new Government.

I am happy to accept clarification of this, but I understand that the SNP Government is thinking of dropping the use of measurements of absolute and relative poverty. If that is the case, it is truly staggering. It is firmly established that action to improve the living circumstances of the poor is vital, but tackling poverty must always be defined as affording our most disadvantaged citizens opportunities to attain a proper stake in improving living standards and shifting aspirations. The SNP cannot claim any credibility in tackling inequality if it abandons the use of the measurement of relative poverty.

Nicola Sturgeon: The definitions of poverty will not change. We want to set clear targets for tackling poverty. We are saying that the target will be to increase not just the overall wealth of the country but the proportion of wealth earned by the bottom 30 per cent. I hope that members throughout the chamber can agree about that.

Margaret Curran: I was not suggesting that the cabinet secretary will shift the definitions of relative and absolute poverty—I do not think that she could do that; I was asking what use is made of those definitions and measurements. I am sure that that conversation will continue, because I do not think that just one target can be set without definitions being applied across the board. I am sure that that issue will emerge in the consultations.

In the press publicity about the SNP's new approach, much has been made of the language that is used and how it is to inform the SNP's thinking. I do not suppose that it is much comfort to those who are struggling to make ends meet to hear that the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Government are spending their time thinking about what words to use; they would prefer us to focus on the actions. However, I concede that there is an argument that the words that we use matter and that they should imply that certain actions will follow.

Although the cabinet secretary did not say this—she did not take any Labour interventions—I am

concerned that the SNP wants to dump the term “social justice.” Social justice is an internationally used term that is widely understood and associated with progressive Governments throughout the world. Many others use it—it has meaning beyond the political world. There was a clear illustration of that only last night, when a leading member of the SNP, at a Burns supper, described Robert Burns as the poet of social justice. When Mike Russell said that, everybody knew exactly what he meant. Perhaps we now need to go back to him and say, “Sorry, Mike, but Robert Burns is now the poet of coherence.” That does not have quite the same ring to it.

Nicola Sturgeon: Will the member take an intervention?

Margaret Curran: No. I am sorry, but I need to watch my time.

No doubt Mike Russell will be told that social justice is to be added to the list of banned terms.

We all know that tackling poverty is a demanding challenge for us all. The key question that we have to put to the SNP is, “What is the core of its fresh approach?” It used to ally itself with the Scottish Socialist Party when we talked about poverty; now it seems that it is allying itself with the Tories. Is it the SNP's argument that general tax cuts help everyone and that poor people still benefit even if the money does not go directly to them but to the better-off? That sounds very much like trickle-down economics to me.

Is it the SNP's argument that universal benefits help the poor as a matter of course? Professor David Bell recently pointed out that the proposals from the SNP that we have heard so far do not help the poor, because the poor are already in receipt of the benefits in question. He went on to say that the £1 billion that will be spent to freeze council tax will directly benefit those who are in the top three bands.

It is legitimate, therefore, to ask the SNP what it is going to do about poverty. It has finally acknowledged that there is no magic wand that can change the statistics overnight. We are entitled to ask what resources in its budget have been explicitly directed towards our poorest households. Where are those commitments? Why has the SNP abandoned our programme of investments? We have always argued that universal services are important, but that they must be underpinned by targeted resources that are directed to the poor, in the form of national programmes that deliver on poverty.

If Labour had been in office, we would not have turned our back on social justice or cut the budgets that are critical to it. For us, social justice would have been centre stage. Tackling poverty is at the core of Labour's beliefs. It not only

addresses social need; it facilitates economic opportunity. Labour's approach is, undoubtedly, internationalist. With Gordon Brown's leadership in the fight against global poverty—[*Laughter.*] Well, it is recognised throughout the world.

In power, Labour would have targeted investment in child care toward those in most need. We would have targeted our money on health and education, on our poorest communities and on our poorest families. The fairer Scotland budget would not have been cut under Labour's leadership. We would have invested in skills and training. That is how poverty is tackled. A coherence target means absolutely nothing. The issue needs real resources and investment. For Labour, economic prosperity and social justice go hand in hand. Sadly, it looks as though the SNP has abandoned that idea.

I move amendment S3M-1260.2, to leave out from "that tackling these challenges" to end and insert

"; regrets that the SNP's approach fails to respond to the needs of the poorest households in Scotland and fails to engage those groups experienced in tackling poverty in finding solutions, and believes that social justice is a priority for the Scottish people and should remain a central policy commitment of the Scottish Government and the Scottish Parliament."

15:17

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):

Tommy Sheridan will be pleased to know that he left behind him a legacy of solidarity that is now a golden rule for this Government.

Reading "Taking Forward the Government Economic Strategy", which mentions the concept of independence, it is quite interesting to note that it says that, between 1995 and 2005, the percentage of people living in poverty fell in both parts of the UK, while in Ireland, Denmark, Sweden and Finland, it rose. Independence is not a golden rule.

I welcome the cabinet secretary's initiative to aid benefits take-up, particularly by pensioners.

Johann Lamont: Does the member recognise the critical role of organisations such as Citizens Advice Scotland in relation to increasing benefits take-up? Does she share my concern that it is possible that such organisations' funding is vulnerable? Will she join me in seeking a commitment from the SNP Government to continue that funding?

Mary Scanlon: I volunteered with Citizens Advice Scotland for many years, so I can testify to the excellent work that it does. I sincerely hope that its funding will not be cut.

Greater emphasis must be given to getting people out of poverty and, if possible, back into

work. There are many types and causes of poverty and just as many ways of dealing with it. We still have in Scotland what is known as genteel poverty. Many people—many of them elderly—are too proud to admit that money is short, and blankly refuse to take up benefits. Largely in the Highlands, there is also hidden poverty. When people live in a beautiful location—as opposed to a deprived part of a large city—the setting can conceal much poverty, and there are the added problems of lack of public transport and high fuel costs, and, often, day-to-day necessities cost more.

According to Help the Aged, 40 per cent of pensioners in Scotland live in fuel poverty and 20 per cent live in income poverty, yet as many as 40 per cent of eligible pensioners do not claim pension credit and an estimated 44 per cent do not claim council tax benefit. We have asked the Scottish Government and the Westminster Government to respond on that issue and I am pleased with what I have heard in that regard today.

Energy efficiency can greatly help to lower fuel bills. The Scottish Conservatives had a manifesto commitment for a fully funded eco-bonus scheme, which would have increased the grant available from local government for insulation, solar panels and other measures. I will look for a similar initiative in the single outcome agreements between local authorities and the Government, which will be published in April.

The Health and Sport Committee has taken evidence on drug and alcohol addiction services. All members should take note of these statistics: 70,000 children in Scotland live with an alcohol-addicted parent and up to 59,000 children live with a drug-addicted parent. I commend Annabel Goldie's work on the issue. I hope that before next week's vote on the budget the Government will make a commitment to support services that do not just park people on methadone but lead people to abstinence and back to independence.

Social enterprise must be one of the best passports out of poverty caused by disability, mental health problems or addiction. There are more than 1,000 social enterprises in Scotland, one of the best of which must be the Shetland community bike project. I met people in Lerwick who were back at work, interacting with other people and no longer dependent on benefits. Many of them were moving on to full-time education or employment. The project's business model is simple. People restore old bikes and then sell them or rent them to tourists. The project is based on the principle of recycling and it helps people and the local and national economy. Such a business model could be replicated in every town in Scotland.

I have received a letter that says that despite the project's positive outcomes in relation to the scheme that is operated by the Scottish centre for healthy working lives, it is threatened with closure due to a lack of funding from the local alcohol and drug action teams. I will pass the correspondence to the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing and I trust that the issue will receive her support.

Last week I attended a briefing hosted by Margo MacDonald. We heard from Transition, which is an Edinburgh-based charity that provides employability services and support for people who are moving on from care, prison, years of drug or alcohol addiction, prostitution or homelessness. Margo and I met people who are in work and people who are at college, preparing for university. We met people who had regained their self-confidence, self-esteem and independence.

We will not support the Liberal amendment, on the basis that the Local Government and Communities Committee's inquiry into fuel poverty offers the best example of cross-party working on poverty. I have no doubt that Jim Tolson, who is the Liberal member on the committee, will do sterling work.

I move amendment S3M-1260.1, to insert at end:

"recognises that the Scottish Government, UK Government and local governments need to work together to get people off welfare and into work where possible and to increase the percentage of benefit take-up ensuring that those most in need of help get it, and calls on the Scottish Government to bring forward proposals to achieve these aims."

15:23

Ross Finnie (West of Scotland) (LD): There is no liberty in poverty and inequality. As members have said, an individual who lives in poverty is more likely to be out of work or surviving on low income or benefits, and a child who lives in poverty is more likely to suffer from poor health and to display low levels of educational attainment.

It is sad that, despite many years of effort, the number of our children who live in families that claim out-of-work benefits is twice the national average. That is why Liberal Democrats, in common with other parties, support measures to eradicate child poverty by 2020. It is also why, as part of the previous coalition Government, we supported measures such as the attack on fuel poverty, the supporting people fund, the community regeneration fund and the increase in child poverty funding for the child care strategy to £43 million during the previous session of the Parliament—an increase of 45 per cent. Under the coalition Government, the number of children living in poverty fell by some 100,000, from

340,000 to 240,000. That was not an insubstantial achievement, but we were never complacent. We knew that more needed to be done, as members said.

Tackling poverty is a complex matter that calls for an integrated approach in which we address levels of income, the environment in which individuals live or are brought up, the discrimination that many people suffer, social exclusion, support for families, health inequalities, educational attainment and opportunities for work.

It would be churlish not to acknowledge the publication this morning of the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing's discussion document on tackling poverty and deprivation. However, as the cabinet secretary admitted, it is only a discussion document. Much work will be needed to produce the solid measures that might require to be put in place. I note that paragraphs 39, 65 and 67 recognise the need to work and collaborate with a wider range of elements of Scottish civic society, which the Liberal Democrat amendment mentions.

To improve the income of people in the lower deciles, we need to work with the United Kingdom Government to ensure access to the appropriate level of benefit support, but we must also ensure that any income increase is fully understood and therefore integrated with the taxation, national insurance and tax credits system to stop people falling back into the poverty trap.

In last week's health improvement debate, I reiterated the Liberal Democrats' commitment to tackling health inequalities, gave our views on preventive and anticipatory care, the extension of the keep well project and hungry for success and looked forward to seeing the outcome of the Government's ministerial task force on health inequalities.

Liberal Democrats acknowledge the need to improve the environment, and particularly the housing, of those who live in poverty. We want fuel poverty to be eradicated by 2015 and we welcome the Local Government and Communities Committee's work on the subject, to which Mary Scanlon referred.

Liberal Democrats share the view that the lack of appropriate and affordable child care is a barrier to parents returning to work. We need to work with the UK Government to ensure that the tax credit benefit keeps pace with inflation, while the Scottish Government must ensure an adequate supply of affordable childcare places.

Liberal Democrats would like, as part of improved family support, every two-year-old to have access to a free place in a playgroup for at least 15 hours a week and to extend entitlement to free nursery places to at least 38 weeks.

Liberal Democrats support workforce plus, and of course we support “More Choices, More Chances”, which the coalition Government introduced. I was a member of the Cabinet sub-committee that produced the recommendations to reduce the proportion of young people who are not in education, employment or training. The previous scheme to increase the number of young people with appropriate skills should continue and we would like a target of at least 50,000 modern apprentices by 2011 to be set. We would also like a project enterprise scheme to be introduced to provide microcredit business support and training for people who are on low incomes.

Liberal Democrats have long held the view that eradicating poverty, especially child poverty, is one of the litmus tests of a civilised society. In the past decade, huge strides have been taken in reducing the number of children who live in poverty, yet the levels of relative poverty stubbornly persist and far too many individuals continue to experience its causes and effects. I noted with interest that the cabinet secretary cited Ireland in her document. Ireland is well recognised for its improved economic performance but, notwithstanding that, even it has had difficulties overcoming relative poverty.

Liberal Democrats believe that if child poverty is to be eradicated within a generation, as it must be, we will require not just renewed commitments by the Scottish and UK Governments, and not just increased collaboration between the Scottish and UK Governments, but total integration of the effort of all those who are engaged in fighting poverty—of all the stakeholders, the professionals, the voluntary sector and the health, education, housing, family support and regeneration agencies. Liberal Democrats believe that, to achieve that, we must go further than the discussion paper suggests. We must recognise that there is no monopoly on wisdom and that all parties are committed to addressing poverty. We want a cross-party investigation and commitment to propose practical steps. Everyone in the Parliament wants the scar of poverty to be eradicated. We need to harness all the talents across parties and throughout Scotland if we are to achieve that aim.

I move amendment S3M-1260.3, to leave out from “that tackling these challenges” to end and insert:

“; believes that tackling poverty requires a co-ordinated approach with the UK Government to ensure that the benefits system supports those most in need and actively encourages those able to return to education, training and work to do so; believes that a cross-party approach to increasing opportunity across Scotland is required, and therefore calls for the establishment of a cross-party inquiry, involving stakeholders, to address the causes and effects of poverty and wealth inequality in Scotland and recommend to the Parliament practical actions in areas

including health, housing, training, social enterprise and the voluntary sector, micro-credit and community regeneration.”

15:29

Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP): To Margaret Curran, I point out that the difference between the SNP and the Labour Party is that the Labour Party pays lip service to social justice, whereas we are taking practical measures to achieve it.

Margaret Curran referred to tax cuts. She seems to be critical of the council tax freeze, which will help many thousands of ordinary families in Scotland, but she did not say anything about the reduction in capital gains tax from 40 to 18 per cent, which will primarily benefit the fat cats in the City of London. Labour has double standards.

If Margaret Curran cares about social justice, why did she vote against a budget that included the abolition of prescription charges? If the vote against the budget had been carried, council taxes would have increased by 22 per cent, which would have driven many people in Scotland into poverty.

Margaret Curran said that the SNP will drop the use of absolute and relative measurements of poverty. I want to correct her on that. I, too, was at the Burns supper last night that was mentioned, and I know my Burns. He said:

“facts are chieles that winna ding”.

Margaret Curran should read paragraphs 31 and 32 of the discussion paper, in which we make it absolutely clear that we will continue to use the standard poverty measures to measure year-on-year progress.

Margaret Curran: Will the member take an intervention?

Alex Neil: I do not have enough time, unfortunately.

Broadly speaking, poverty is heavily concentrated in five groups in our society. There is child poverty, and poverty among disabled people, which often does not receive the attention that it merits.

Johann Lamont: Will the member take an intervention?

Alex Neil: I do not have enough time.

There is pensioner poverty, and poverty among people in work. The most recent reports show that 50 per cent of people of working age who are classified as being in poverty are in employment. Many people live in poverty as a result of low pay.

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

Alex Neil: I do not have enough time.

Finally, it is obvious that unemployed people often live in poverty.

Poverty has different aspects. Fuel poverty is a major form of poverty in Scotland. Only a few years ago, it looked like we might begin to see the end of fuel poverty in Scotland by around 2016, but the recent increases in energy prices have set back our ability to achieve that objective in a short timeframe. I hope that the UK Government will consider rechannelling the extra £175 million of VAT receipts that the Treasury will receive next year as a result of the increases in energy prices to deal with fuel poverty both north and south of the border.

There is a link between the Parliament's powers and our ability to deal with the fundamental causes of poverty. Some aspects of the UK tax system contribute to inequality and unfairness. Employees' national insurance contributions are an example. A low earner contributes 11 per cent of their total income in national insurance contributions, but a person who earns £100,000 a year makes national insurance contributions of around 6 per cent of their total wage. That is not fair. Removing such unfairness would help to tackle the escalation of inequality in our society.

Many of the weapons that are available to the devolved Government have been mentioned. In that context, I congratulate Ross Finnie on suggesting practical and useful ideas about what the Parliament can do.

The three major causes of poverty in our society are unemployment, low pay and bad housing. The Government's commitment to increase the number of houses that are built from 24,000 to 35,000 units a year will contribute greatly towards alleviating poverty in Scotland. Not only will that help to solve the housing problem, but it will create many more new jobs throughout Scotland.

Johann Lamont: Will the member take an intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member is winding up.

Alex Neil: We are taking many practical measures that are within our devolved powers, but we will not be able to solve poverty in Scotland until we have the freedom and the power in the Parliament to do so.

15:35

David Whitton (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab): I speak in support of the amendment in the name of my colleague Margaret Curran.

I made my maiden speech in the Parliament last year during a debate about how to promote wealth and fairness. I spoke about the East

Dunbartonshire Council area, which covers my constituency. Of Scotland's 32 local authorities, it is listed as the least deprived. However, the statistics can be misleading. It is true that there are more people in work there and fewer out of work than the Scottish national average. It is also true that the average life expectancy there for men and women is above the national average.

Other statistics about those who live in my constituency do not make such pleasant reading. In the Hillhead and Broomhill area of Kirkintilloch, 25 per cent of the working-age population are in receipt of out-of-work benefits. To put that in some context, that is the same as the rate for Glasgow. In the areas of Kirkintilloch central, east Harestaness and Twechar, Auchinairn and Crowhill and Hillhead and Broomhill, more than 20 per cent of pensioners receive the guaranteed part of the pension credit. The rate for the rest of East Dunbartonshire is 12 per cent.

I was a little puzzled at the weekend to read that the SNP's answer to tackling poverty would be simply to change the language of how it is described. To be fair to the SNP, and having read its discussion paper, that is only one of the things on which it wants to consult. Like Margaret Curran, however, I make no apology for stating that social justice is what I want and what my constituents want, particularly those who are living in poverty—an equal chance to improve their lot in life.

The First Minister said, when talking about his Government's economic priorities, that he wanted not just to grow the economy but to allow all citizens to benefit from further wealth. I have no argument with that, but the best way out of poverty is to get a job that pays a decent wage. Alex Neil and other SNP members should not forget that the SNP did not turn up to vote when we introduced the national minimum wage.

Companies throughout Scotland in all sectors are crying out for skilled workers, yet when Labour lodged amendments to the budget to create more skills academies and to increase the number of modern apprenticeships from 34,000 to 50,000, they were voted down, and not just by SNP members—they were aided and abetted by the Liberals and the Tories. Our amendments would have meant less spent on tarmac and more spent on talent. I still hope that the SNP will reconsider our proposals before the budget is finalised next week.

On page 9 of the Government's discussion paper, under the heading of "Alleviating the impact of poverty on people's lives", it is claimed that that can be done by, among other things, funding free prescriptions,

"providing free bus travel for older people and discounted travel for young people ... and through the introduction of"

what the discussion paper describes as

“a fairer Local Income Tax to replace Council Tax.”

Will those measures work? According to Professor David Bell, the adviser to the Finance Committee, whose name has already been mentioned,

“When finances are constrained”

—as the SNP keeps telling us they are—

“the Scottish Government must consider whether it should be more selective in providing benefits to the Scottish population. Universal provision can be unfair, since it provides just as much help to the affluent as to the poor”.

He cites as examples the freezing of council tax, the removal of tuition fees and the provision of free prescriptions.

The thrust of the SNP budget is to achieve its aim of a council tax freeze and, as witnessed at paragraph 52 on page 11 of the discussion paper, the introduction of local income tax. The SNP intends to spend £1 billion over three years to do that.

Professor Bell says:

“Those in council tax bands F, G and H gain most from a council tax freeze ... This is because many households in bands A-E receive council tax discounts ... and/or council tax benefits. Because their weekly council tax bill is small or zero, they have little to gain from a freeze on council tax.”

It just so happens that about 30 per cent of the housing stock in Strathkelvin and Bearsden is in the top three bands, with 30 per cent in the bottom three bands. Therefore, in my constituency, the rich will get richer and the poor will gain little or nothing at all. We know that, under the SNP's proposals for a local income tax, anyone living on unearned income will not pay either, so the fat cats who support the SNP will be laughing all the way to the bank. How does Alex Neil square that with tackling inequality and deprivation in Scotland?

On the evidence so far, the SNP is failing Scotland's poorest. It knows that there is a problem, but it does not have a clue about the solution. Policies such as freezing council tax and introducing free prescriptions will not help the poorest—the evidence to the Finance Committee shows that. The poorest people in my constituency want to know whether the investment that was made in housing and urban regeneration programmes by the previous Administration will continue. The evidence so far shows a real-terms cut of 1.6 per cent in the difference between 2007 and 2004.

Two weeks ago, I visited the breakfast club at St Flannans primary school in the Hillhead district of Kirkintilloch, which is one of the areas that I talked about earlier. The club at St Flannans is one of more than 30 such clubs, but it is by far the biggest; 120 children attend most mornings for

milk, juice and toast. The headteacher told me that, if the club was not there, many of those children would not have anything to eat before they started their day. That is poverty. It costs £16,000 a year to run that club, but for such a small investment life chances can be changed. That kind of investment will help to cut the rates of poverty in Scotland.

Duncan McNeil: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. There are clear rules on responsibility and the courtesy that members extend to one another in debates. Will you confirm that it is a discourtesy for the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing, who led the debate, to leave the debate and have meetings with her officials at the back of the chamber? Does that not confirm her lack of respect for any view other than her own?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The cabinet secretary had indicated to me earlier that she had to leave the chamber for a few minutes.

15:41

Joe FitzPatrick (Dundee West) (SNP): I welcome this debate on an issue that is of great importance to all members, although I was amazed to hear, in Mr Whitton's speech, a Labour MSP arguing against the removal of prescription charges and the freezing of council tax, and in favour of more means testing. If Mr Whitton went out to speak to working-class people in his or any other constituency, he would quickly find out that the people of Scotland want the council tax to be frozen, prescription charges to be abolished and the council tax to be removed altogether.

David Whitton: It might come as a surprise to Mr FitzPatrick, but I go out and talk to my constituents. They tell me exactly what I just said: free prescriptions for all are not the answer. The member need only speak to the adviser to his own Finance Committee, who points out in his report to the committee that that is not the answer.

Joe FitzPatrick: If those are the answers that Mr Whitton is getting in his constituency, perhaps he is being selective in whom he speaks to. Perhaps that is why Labour did so poorly in the election.

The importance that the Government places on tackling poverty can be seen clearly in its actions during its first eight months in office. A free school meals pilot, the scrapping of prescription charges, the council tax freeze and commitment to introducing a local income tax, a 19 per cent rise in spending on affordable housing, and a ministerial task force on health inequalities are just a few examples that show that the SNP Government takes the issue of poverty seriously.

As well as congratulating the SNP Government, I acknowledge the work of the previous

Administration. The fight against poverty is far too important for us to allow narrow party-political interests to come in the way of progress. That is why the SNP supported most of the previous Executive's antipoverty measures. It is disappointing that only one part of that previous Executive has come to today's debate with constructive arguments on how to tackle poverty.

As we have heard, the situation in Scotland is not getting any better for those at the lower end of the income spectrum. Let there be no doubt that there is still a serious problem in Scotland with poverty. Dundee is a much-changed city—members have heard me extol the virtues of the growing science, technology and digital media sectors—but the blight of poverty remains. Levels of child poverty in Dundee are twice the national average, and 20,000 people live in what are classed as severely income-deprived households. The situation is bad and, in spite of efforts, it has not been getting much better.

Figures provided by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation show that the number of children in Scotland in low-income households did not change between 1997 and 2006. That is in contrast with the rest of Britain, where the number declined. Barnardo's, the Child Poverty Action Group, Save the Children and the Poverty Alliance all argue that the main areas of focus for targeting child poverty should be to support parents into work and help them to remain there, and to increase the uptake of benefits and tax credit. While those policy areas remain under the control of Westminster, we will continue to work with one hand tied behind our back. Scotland's priorities are not the priorities of the UK and will inevitably be ignored by Westminster.

Margaret Curran: I understand the logic of the member's argument, which is that only an independent Scotland could tackle those issues. I do not agree with that, but I understand the logic. Given that the Scottish National Party wants powers to deal with the minimum wage in Scotland, does the member think that the minimum wage should be increased to deal with low pay?

Joe FitzPatrick: I think that the decision should be made by this Parliament.

Scotland's priorities are not the priorities of the UK and will inevitably be ignored by Westminster. The contrast is perhaps best demonstrated by comparing the tax policies of the Scottish and UK Administrations. On the one hand, our SNP Government is determined to scrap the unfair council tax in favour of a system that takes into account people's incomes. That is a progressive tax change. On the other hand, Gordon Brown and London Labour have abolished the 10p tax rate. That is a regressive tax change. One policy will

remove a heavy burden from low-income families; the other will see the poor subsidising the rich. Margaret Curran's amendment refers to the needs of the poorest households and to social justice. It is plain to see which of those two approaches to tax meets her criteria—and it is not Gordon Brown's. As long as Westminster panders to middle England, the most vulnerable in our society will be ignored. Scotland is faced with problems for which we need Scottish solutions.

I had hoped to touch on disability poverty, which has been championed by Leonard Cheshire Disability. Its recent report paints a damning picture of disability poverty in Scotland, with people twice as likely to live in poverty if they happen to be disabled. We cannot accept that that situation should continue. Over the past 10 years, the issue of disability poverty has been marginalised. In the case of disability poverty, instead of "Things can only get better", things have got worse. Figures show that, whereas 80 per cent of non-disabled Scots are in employment, only 48 per cent of disabled people are in employment. That is not because disabled Scots are less likely to want to work, as only a tiny number of disabled people are unable to work. That issue needs to be challenged, and it needs to be challenged soon.

15:47

Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab): I say to Alex Neil that I remember when SNP members at Westminster did not even go into the voting lobby to vote for the minimum wage. I remember when, by one vote, the SNP sentenced the UK to the Thatcher Government that brought so much misery for 19 years. I see history beginning to unfold and repeat itself as Scotland moves to having one of its most right-wing Governments in decades, with the Tories and the SNP getting in bed together and forming an alliance.

Labour in Scotland has led the way in the United Kingdom by introducing measures that have helped pensioners, such as free personal care, free central heating and the national concessionary bus travel scheme.

Sandra White (Glasgow) (Con): Will the member take an intervention?

Helen Eadie: Like Alex Neil and other members on that side of the chamber, including Joe FitzPatrick, I do not have time.

Help the Aged, along with many pensioners throughout Scotland, strongly welcomed and supported the measures that Labour introduced. The initial results of the central heating programme were excellent. As the Government's report on the first three years of the programme pointed out, significant increases were achieved in energy efficiency in recipient households. On

average in such households, the expenditure that was needed for a satisfactory heating regime decreased by 47.6 per cent and increases were achieved in both the temperature and the length of time that heating was used for. However, like Help the Aged in Scotland—which kindly sent us a briefing, of which we take careful note—we are concerned that 30,000 pensioners in Scotland remain in deep poverty, with incomes below 50 per cent of median national earnings.

We must not ignore what has been said by my friend and colleague the Minister of State at the Scotland Office, David Cairns. He pointed out that the Government has succeeded in arresting the long-term trend in rising child poverty, with 80,000 children lifted out of relative poverty in Scotland since 1999.

I also support my other Westminster colleague, the Minister of State for Employment and Welfare Reform, Stephen Timms. He said that work is the best route out of poverty; it is good for people's health and well-being, their self-esteem and the future prospects of their families; and it promotes choice and independence, supports our society and increases community cohesion. We must keep in mind during our deliberations and our work the fact that the figures show that disabled people are twice as likely to live in poverty as non-disabled people—the figure is 30 per cent, compared with 16 per cent. The future welfare of Remploy, a company that every member in the chamber will support, must be central to all the work that we do.

Poverty affects many pensioners in Scotland. Almost one in five of them lives in relative income poverty, more than 40 per cent live in fuel poverty, and a large number fail to claim the benefits to which they are entitled. In Scotland, 16 per cent of pensioners live in relative income poverty after paying their housing costs; that amounts to 150,000 people.

Mary Scanlon: Will the member give a little bit of credit to the Scottish Conservatives who, this afternoon, called for measures to help increase the uptake of pension credit and council tax credit?

Helen Eadie: I will always give credit to Mary Scanlon, who is a hard-working and diligent member. She is right to make that point.

We all know, and it was stated in Help the Aged Scotland's briefing to MSPs, that managing on a low income throughout old age can turn retirement into a grind and struggle rather than the time of relaxation and enjoyment that many of us hope for. In our view, older people who have worked hard all their lives ought to receive state pensions that afford them the security and dignity to lead

fulfilling lives rather than being left to struggle to get by on a day-by-day basis.

I join other members in welcoming the fact that there will be a benefits checks campaign. When Labour undertook that task many years ago, I know for a fact that an extra £60,000 per week in benefits was brought into one of our small villages in west Fife. If that were to be replicated throughout Scotland, it would make a tremendous difference.

It is deplorable to make disabled and sick pensioners pay for the council tax freeze that will benefit people such as the well-off members in the chamber. That is disgraceful. The cabinet secretary talks about removing the 10 per cent tax band for the poorest, but Scotland is seeing the reincarnation of the sheriff of Nottingham in the shape of Alex Salmond. He is taking from the nation's sick, disabled and disadvantaged—people such as my constituent who, under the auspices of Fife's SNP and Liberal Democrat-controlled council, cannot even get a stair rail, or such as those throughout Scotland who are waiting for their central heating to be dealt with. My current case load is obscene.

Also obscene is the policy on charging, whereby elderly people have to pay £7 per trip for their shopping to be done and £1 per week for their community alarms under SNP-controlled Fife Council.

Joe FitzPatrick: Will the member take an intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member is just about to conclude.

Helen Eadie: It is obscene that a grandfather has to look after his grandchildren in my constituency when the Government could take the initiative and introduce a kinship carers allowance.

Those are all important issues. The sheriff of Nottingham is taking from the poor to pay for the rich and their council tax.

15:54

Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I refer members to my interest in the agricultural industry, to which I will refer in my speech.

History teaches us, and the SNP concedes the point in its motion, that the single most effective way to lift people out of poverty is to grow the economy so that more people are in work and earning enough money to allow them to provide for themselves and their families, and to provide the wherewithal for decent pensions and welfare. Therefore, every able adult of working age who is capable of earning a decent living for themselves

and their dependents must be given the incentive to do so. The stronger the economy, the better the welfare system will be.

A good welfare system is required to enable financially those people who are unable to work or who find themselves temporarily out of work. Within that context, I want to highlight the very real problems that face the rural primary industries in my region of the Highlands and Islands and which are contributing to real poverty in our remote communities. Unless something is done, the problems will get much worse. Although much of the debate has rightly focused on conditions in the most urban parts of Scotland, the Parliament and all MSPs have a duty to consider and address the issues of rural poverty and deprivation.

The main industry on most of the open land in the Highlands and Islands continues to be livestock agriculture. For farmers and crofters, 2007 was the worst year that most can remember. I am pleased that I was at least able to help achieve the £6 per ewe foot-and-mouth compensation payment from the Scottish Government and payments under the light lamb welfare scheme, also from that source. I thank the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment, Richard Lochhead, for listening and acting, albeit that both payments were less than what was called for.

However, it is disappointing that the Scottish Government seems no longer to be putting pressure on Hilary Benn, the Labour Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, for compensation to alleviate the huge losses that the livestock farming industry in Scotland has incurred due to the serious and fundamental mistake by the Government's laboratory at Pirbright. The NFU Scotland and the National Sheep Association tell me that the present UK Labour Government refuses to acknowledge the catastrophic losses to the sheep industry. It is undoubtedly the case that those losses will contribute to severe rural poverty. To compound the industry's difficulties, feed prices have doubled since last year and the price that sheep made at the autumn sales would have been laughable if the position was not so deadly serious.

Much is made of the Highland culture in which people in remote communities look after one another. Poverty can destroy such communities and that culture. That is why I ask the Scottish Government to find out why primary livestock producers on the continent, in countries such as France and Germany, receive so much more for their product than the equivalent primary producers here in Scotland receive. We are, after all, meant to have a common market.

I will continue to keep up pressure on the long-suffering cabinet secretary, Richard Lochhead, to

make him aware of the predicament of those who depend on the agriculture of the Highlands and Islands. I refer not only to farmers and crofters, but to all those who earn their living from agriculture including those in the haulage industry, animal feed industry and veterinary industry, as well as the fencing contractors, auctioneers and market men. Will our cabinet secretary let Hilary Benn get away with this scandal?

Other members referred to fuel poverty in the context of rising electricity and central heating bills. Those price rises impact particularly on pensioners and those who are on low incomes. The high cost of petrol and diesel is having a devastating effect on many rural businesses—quite simply, some of our small companies are being priced out of the marketplace.

I was in Stornoway early last week. In some parts of the Western Isles, petrol is more than £1.20 a litre, which is around 20 per cent more than the average mainland price. That high cost is crippling the lives of local residents and deterring tourism. Higher haulage costs increase the price of goods in the shops in the Western Isles. I would be interested to hear the cabinet secretary's view on that and whether she agrees that inflation in many of our island and remote communities is running way above the headline rate of inflation, due in large part to the rising cost of fuel.

Since the route out of poverty in rural areas is a mosaic of thriving small businesses, it is important that the physical routes that are vital for those businesses are kept open. I point out to the Scottish Government that the lifeline A82 to the Highlands still has a single-line section with traffic lights that has been in place for more than 30 years. Also, its sister road, the A83, now has a similar single-line section at the Rest and Be Thankful. Good road links are essential to local businesses and tourism, and bad infrastructure relates directly to rural poverty.

I share my colleague Mary Scanlon's concerns about the appalling health statistics in some parts of Scotland. I will support any measures to bring about change. We must eliminate the culture of dependency that leads not only to poverty and deprivation, but to feelings of exclusion, depression and despair among many who are caught in the trap.

The Scottish Conservatives will support any moves to make the Scottish economy more competitive and to make conditions more conducive to job creation. We believe that those are the best ways in which to reduce and eradicate poverty. I hope that the cabinet secretary and ministers will acknowledge the specific problems that face the primary industries in the rural areas of Scotland. I support the

amendment in the name of my colleague Mary Scanlon.

15:59

Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP): I was amazed by Helen Eadie's speech and am sorry that she did not take an intervention from me. She said that "Labour in Scotland has led the way".

If that is the case, I wonder why the Scottish Labour leader, Wendy Alexander, had to go down to the British Labour Party conference to apologise for losing the Scottish election.

I thank the Scottish Government for instigating this debate on poverty. It is the most important problem that we face and it continues to blight the lives of so many of our people. I remind members that the previous Executive never brought poverty before Parliament as a subject for debate. I shall explain that point and quote from the motion that the SNP lodged on the subject in 2002. *[Interruption.]* Will you please listen, Ms Eadie?

Despite what I have just said, I believe sincerely that members from all parties genuinely want to tackle poverty. However, the big difference is in how we intend to do it.

Johann Lamont: Will you name one thing—within the powers of the Parliament—that we did not do in the past eight years that you would have done and are now asking the Government to do?

Sandra White: If you listen to my speech, Johann—I am sorry, Ms Lamont—you may learn something. I believe sincerely that all of us have the interests of the people of Scotland at heart and that we want to eradicate poverty, but we propose different ways of doing that. If you will listen to me, I will explain how we intend to tackle the issue.

Helen Eadie: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. For some time, I have witnessed the pedantry of the Presiding Officers regarding use of the word "you". Sandra White used the word "you", but you did not pull her up for that. I was pulled up for it during questions yesterday. I would like to see consistency in the Parliament, but most of all, I would like to see the end of pedantry in the Parliament. That comment is not aimed at you, Presiding Officer.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): You are right in principle. I did not hear Sandra White use the word "you". When I hear it used, I usually pull the member concerned up for that. I remind members to address other members through the chair and to use their full names.

Sandra White: I corrected myself, but perhaps Helen Eadie did not hear that.

The first debate in Parliament that included poverty in its title was initiated by the SNP. Our motion stated that

"the most effective way to tackle poverty in Scotland is to ensure that all powers over tax and spending decisions are transferred from Westminster to the Scottish Parliament."

That is true, but this minority SNP Government has developed innovative ideas to tackle poverty within the present powers of the Parliament. It should be congratulated, not derided, for that.

Measures such as the freezing of council tax, free school meals projects, an increase in nursery provision, the abolition of prescription charges, the move towards a local income tax and the central heating programme have been mentioned. We have inherited problems from the past eight years when the previous Executive was in government, but I am sure that this Government will tackle them. I have great faith in the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing and the Minister for Communities and Sport.

One of the most important issues, on which Ross Finnie touched in his speech and his amendment, is the need for joined-up thinking—we must speak to other people. The cabinet secretary mentioned that when she launched the framework that is to be developed, which will take a different approach. I believe that the framework will achieve the practical outcome of reducing the appalling figure that one in four children in Scotland is officially recognised as poor, and will reduce the effects of poverty on those children's health. I ask the cabinet secretary, when responses to the discussion and the framework have been received and considered, to pay special attention to the appalling and shocking figures for Glasgow, my home and constituency, which contains 52 per cent of the most deprived 5 per cent of areas in Scotland.

Margaret Curran: Will the member give way?

Sandra White: I am sorry, but I do not have much time.

A child who is born in the east end of Glasgow is three times more likely to suffer from heart disease, four times more likely to grow up in a workless household and 10 times more likely to be hospitalised than a child who is born in a prosperous suburb. It is disgraceful that in the east end of Glasgow a man can expect to live to only 54.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You have one minute left.

Sandra White: After so many years of devolution and Labour and Liberal Democrat Government, those figures are truly shameful. Nevertheless, Opposition members such as Margaret Curran talk about the great job that the

UK Government is doing, how Scotland is better off and how good Gordon Brown is. When will the Labour Party in Scotland have the courage to condemn the inequalities that are faced in Scotland today?

Margaret Curran rose—

Sandra White: I am sorry, but I cannot give way.

Pensioners suffer greatly—one in five is in poverty and more than 40 per cent of them face fuel poverty. That is not a record to be proud of.

I know that I have less than a minute left, but I want to congratulate Scottish and Southern Energy on its approach to fuel poverty. It is the only company that does not put up prices during the winter months and which has social tariffs. It is doing a wonderful job, and I ask the minister—

Helen Eadie: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. The member mentioned Scottish and Southern Energy, but she should have declared an interest because that company paid for an employee to be seconded to the SNP. A number of donations to the party are shown on the Electoral Commission's register.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I do not have that information. That was not a point of order. I ask Ms White to wind up.

Sandra White: Thank you, Presiding Officer. It is a pity that we do not have a bit more time. I know nothing about the issue that Helen Eadie raises.

I hope that other energy companies will look at the good work that Scottish and Southern Energy is doing. It is difficult for people to access the necessary information, and I ask the minister to take that fact on board.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I remind members to address each other by their full names and, if they have something to declare, to declare it.

16:06

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): I thank the Scottish Government for this entirely appropriate debate.

At issue is what we can do to tackle poverty, which members of all political parties recognise is an evil. I turn first to an issue that my colleague Ross Finnie and others have mentioned, and which has been recognised by Nicola Sturgeon—the record of the previous Administration. Since 2001, 141,000 homes have benefited from insulation and 77,494 homes have had central heating systems installed through the warm deal programme.

My second point is one that Mary Scanlon, who has left the chamber, and Sandra White among others touched on—fuel poverty. Although the Westminster Government can control many things and we can control many things, the international price of oil is not one of them. That has a huge impact on some of the poorest sectors of society, including elderly and disabled people in my constituency, many of whom simply cannot afford to pay their heating bills. They are left with an invidious choice between going into debt and turning the heating off. Today's weather highlights what a difficult position to be put in that is. It would be a mistake to suggest that the issue affects only people in Caithness and Easter Ross—people who live in rural areas in places such as Cornwall or Wales face the same situation.

It is easy for us to say that the UK Government, which is taking record revenues as a result of the high price of oil, should do something to address fuel poverty on a UK-wide basis, but there is a danger that in doing that we would duck the question of what the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Government can do. To that end, in early December I lodged a motion in which I outlined the problem and suggested to the Scottish Government various measures that could be introduced, such as improved insulation, acceleration of the installation of new heating systems and perhaps even some form of trigger-point system on cost, whereby financial assistance would be offered when the price of oil reached a certain point. Given that the price of oil can go down as well as up, it is necessary to have an on/off switch.

My third point is about the take-up of benefits. In this regard, the provision of money advice by councils is very important. When Rob Gibson and I were councillors in the Highlands in the early to mid-1990s, we were forced by budgetary constraints to make extremely difficult decisions. Sometimes we had to hit some of the council's softer services, one of which was money advice. I suggested in this morning's debate that some—I hope not all—councils might experience budgetary difficulties with the present settlement, so I ask ministers that, when council budgets are settled, they conduct an audit of outcomes to find out, in particular, how social work provision and money advice provision are impacting on poverty. If we undermine money advice, we will be going in entirely the wrong direction.

My fourth and final point, which has also been raised previously, is about working together. Mary Scanlon and others mentioned the work of the Local Government and Communities Committee, of which my colleague Jim Tolson is a member. I believe that it is taking a hugely constructive approach to its inquiry on child poverty. Ross Finnie quite rightly broadened out the issue. I

make no apologies for mentioning this yet again, but with the on-going decommissioning at Dounreay and the present—and disgraceful—impasse at the Nigg yard, where one intransigent landowner is preventing that splendid facility from providing employment, my constituency faces not only the threat of people being out of work or of having to move away in order to find work, but the threat of straightforward rural poverty. When Ross Finnie talks about working together, that means that Nicola Sturgeon should work properly with Jim Mather and her other colleagues to tackle the problems. At Dounreay, work that I hope will be successful is in hand to establish successor industries to give people quality jobs and keep them from poverty. As for Nigg, the landowner will probably have to be forced to sell through compulsory purchase orders.

I welcome the statement by Nicola—I am sorry; I mean Nicola Sturgeon—that she will work with Westminster. As members of all parties have hinted, both Governments have to find a way to work together. Poverty is no respecter of borders.

Before I sit down, I remind members of the good work of the cross-party group on tackling debt, of which it has been my privilege to be a member since its inception. I invite members to look at what it does and to take part in its discussions. We have, for example, been working on the matter of gas and electricity companies suddenly switching off a supply because the bill has not been paid and plunging people not only into poverty but into the cold.

I ask members to support Mr Finnie's excellent amendment.

16:12

Mr Frank McAveety (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab): I rise in support of Margaret Curran's amendment.

I presume that all members agree that we do not want anyone's destiny to be determined by their income or their first steps to be pre-determined by their social and economic background. Yesterday, we debated the importance not only of teaching but of learning from Scottish history. If that history teaches us anything, it is that too many of our ordinary citizens have been excluded from participating in society to the best of their abilities. I believe that the real lesson is not only that we learn from the past but that we have the analysis to allow us to understand what we can take from the past, apply to the present and amplify for the future.

In the spirit of graciousness, I hope that we are having such a debate with the new Government. I also hope that Parliament has a common commitment to tackling the scourge of poverty,

whether it is experienced by pensioners, people with disabilities, people who are not fortunate enough to find anything other than low-income work or people who are condemned by circumstances to be dependent on benefits.

The real debate is about the choices that Parliament can make. I acknowledge that I have a difference of opinion with colleagues in the chamber over whether the Parliament's current powers are appropriate or should be more extensive. However, I am worried about the casual way in which people conclude that everyone else is to blame for poverty and we cannot take any responsibility for it ourselves. If this debate is about what we can do within the powers of the Parliament, we should have it.

I have heard what members have said in the past on this subject. Indeed, a member who has already spoken this afternoon once said:

"It does not matter whether it is called relative, absolute or persistent poverty—it is poverty."—[*Official Report*, 29 November 2006; c 29803.]

I agree with that comment by Sandra White, which was made a number of months before the change in Government.

I want to address the way in which we use our budget. During a previous budget debate, I quoted a candidate in the Democratic Party elections in the United States, who said:

"Show me your budget, and I'll show you what you value."

It is legitimate to consider that quotation, because the two key elements of the narrative in Scottish politics apropos the SNP are the freeze on the council tax and tackling business rates. The SNP has found some agreement in a rather colourful way—agreement was achieved last week through the combination of the SNP and the Conservatives, with the noble abstention of the Greens.

The real issue is what we do with the powers that we have. Last night, members from all parties were at an Energy Action Scotland Burns night. If we took the money that is being used for the council tax freeze, we could deliver on the ambition for the central heating programme that Energy Action Scotland identified last night. We could extend elements of the central heating programme, even if there are difficulties with it, as the Labour leader identified at First Minister's question time today, and with which the First Minister did not disagree.

I have the benefit of a very good income because I am a member of the Scottish Parliament. I still live in the same house that I had well before I was an MSP—I am such a noble and austere individual—so the council tax freeze will

save me about £36 or £39 a year. I will have the sum total saving of 70p per week. To return to Scottish history and language, we could take away that 70p from people such as me and give it to the people who need it most. Many a mickle makes a muckle. The real challenge is how we use the powers intelligently in the Parliament.

My criticism of the Administration that we have had since May is that the agenda has been all about either a council tax freeze or business taxation. We have had many noble speeches. I count Alex Neil as a good debating colleague, but he always tries to remind me of the guilt that he alleges I should feel as a member of the Labour Party. However, I have not heard Alex Neil say anything about the rubber-chicken debate that has been put round the Parliament by our Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism, who says that we can have low taxation and low corporation tax, but still provide the sort of support and services that are necessary to tackle poverty and which exist in the Scandinavian countries. That is a noble ambition, but I would like to know how we can achieve it with those two contradictory aims. Perhaps the SNP, which often faces many ways, can do that.

I will conclude on a final important point. We want to address how we deal with poverty. Although Labour's budget proposals were not accepted by the Administration, they identified several ways in which we could tackle poverty and reduce its extent. People need skills and training to get into work; when they are in work, they should have the opportunity to continue to improve their skills through training and to improve their income so that they are not condemned to low-income employment.

We need to work in partnership. SNP members cannot talk about the need to work in partnership to tackle poverty if they then, at the conclusion of every major statement they make, claim that Westminster is to blame. We have a shared responsibility—that is what devolution is about. That is the test that we have. I hope that the Administration can rise more effectively to that challenge in order to tackle poverty in Scotland.

16:18

John Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP): I congratulate the cabinet secretary on the motion. The Scottish Government is attempting to develop an holistic approach to tackling poverty, although the present constitutional arrangements do not always offer the necessary scope to drive forward the agenda as I would desire. I welcome the debate, because poverty and its consequences have existed for a long time: the complex aspects of poverty are deep seated and, shamefully, still too embedded in many of our communities.

Seebohm Rowntree wrote about poverty in the homogeneous working population in York more than a century ago. Then, the factors behind poverty could be narrowed down to a few: large families, low incomes and loss of earnings because of sickness, for example. Today, the factors that drive poverty are more diverse, but they are still as challenging. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation publication from 2004 entitled "One Hundred Years of Poverty and Policy", by Howard Glennerster, provides an ideal context in which to examine the debate on poverty.

Progress on poverty since the mid-1980s has relied on a few mechanisms—usually, the hope that economic growth will trickle down to the poorest in society or that the increasing dynamic of welfare-to-work programmes will by themselves solve working-age poverty without there being any meaningful change in the incomes of those who remain out of work. In recent times the focus of UK Government priorities has led to the over-the-top situation—

Johann Lamont: John Wilson's Government says that it has received a tight budget settlement and that its budget choices indicate its priorities. Is it reasonable for his Government to support the extraction of £265 million from the budget to give to business unconditionally for the next three years?

John Wilson: If we consider Gordon Brown and the Chancellor of the Exchequer's policies down south, we see that they have similar policies to ours to try to develop business.

Labour members have been told in previous debates that we have to work within a tight financial settlement. I want to come on to discuss some of the issues that the Government has taken on board in tackling some key issues related to poverty.

As I was saying, in recent times the focus of UK Government priorities has led to the over-the-top situation in which the Department for Work and Pensions currently spends £1.50 to identify each £1 of overpayment. Benefit fraud has fallen from £2 billion a year to £800 million a year since 2000, but the recent National Audit Office report of 23 January 2008 stated that £154 million was spent in the previous financial year to identify £106 million of overpayments due to fraud. In answer to points that were raised by Mary Scanlon, Helen Eadie and Jamie Stone, I say that that money could be used to ensure that benefits go to the people who are most in need. At the moment, we still have a Government at Westminster that demands that people ask for benefits, when it could use the 25 million names and addresses on its database to ensure that benefits go directly to the people who deserve them the most. I hope that that will be taken up in the debate on poverty.

A recent strength of the policy on poverty has been the acknowledgement that poverty is multifaceted. The emphasis on social exclusion was to be welcomed, but that agenda was nothing new to some of us who have been working on social exclusion issues for many years—I could give various examples. The French Government took up social exclusion as an issue and in 1996 President Chirac visited Easterhouse to see the programmes that were running there.

Given the diverse nature of poverty, it is not surprising that the policy mix needs to be flexible in tackling it. Some academics have identified the need to tackle poverty through work for those who can. Issues have also arisen to do with the group of people who are in deepest poverty—namely, adults without children. They have been identified time and again in discussions on the widening gaps in society. Those people suffer the most poverty, even compared to some of the groups that other members identified.

In July 2007, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation reported that the gap between rich and poor was as wide as it had been for 40 years. That is true despite 10 years of the Labour Government at Westminster. Society has become more polarised since the 1980s, and a consequence has been that wealthier people have moved to the suburbs while the poorest have tended to remain in the inner cities, although I accept that we cannot ignore rural poverty, which other members have mentioned.

Opposition members, especially Labour members, will refer to the introduction of the national minimum wage. However, I will ask Labour members two questions: what is the current national minimum wage, and what is the median income? Labour members should answer those questions and then do the calculations and ask themselves whether the minimum wage is actually lifting people out of poverty. The trade union Unison represents many part-time workers. In its submission to the Low Pay Commission in September 2007, it stressed that the national minimum wage needed to be strengthened. It stated that the full national minimum wage should begin at age 16 for all workers. The old trade union adage about paying the rate for the job springs to mind.

The motion should receive the full support of all members. The cabinet secretary is trying to move the debate forward. That debate should be held, and it should help to truly eradicate poverty from our society.

16:24

Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab): I will be supporting the amendment in the name of

my colleague Margaret Curran. Of all issues, I particularly welcome the opportunity to debate poverty this afternoon. I do not think that there is a member in the chamber who would question the need for the Government to act decisively to tackle poverty in all its many manifestations. It must surely be one of the main duties of any progressive Government to tackle inequality. George Bernard Shaw, a great writer and a good socialist, said:

“The greatest of evils and the worst of crimes is poverty”.

Our task as elected representatives is to put in place the practical policies that directly address that evil.

Of course, as other members have indicated—John Wilson just did so—poverty is a complex phenomenon. Its causes include a lack of access to good education and training opportunities, health inequalities, social fragmentation and isolation, substandard housing and poor access to transport links. There is also the familial and social disruption that drug and alcohol abuse causes. Those remain significant problems with which the Parliament must wrestle. Not to do so would be to accept the inevitability of a culture of low aspiration, which—to be frank—is unacceptable.

Most objective observers would agree that the previous Labour-led Executives made significant progress in all those areas. Certainly, there was a conviction that much needed to be done to repair Scotland's social and economic fabric after the dark days of Thatcher and Major, when unemployment was used as a tool of economic management—a policy that proved disastrous for communities the length and breadth of our country, but particularly in our cities. I point out to Ms White that it affected people south of the border as well as people in Scotland.

Members will recall that west central Scotland in particular suffered from high unemployment, tight expenditure constraints on local government and extremely limited provision for families, especially mothers. Many members will share my experience of having watched with despair as skilled craftsmen and craftswomen in my local area found themselves unemployed and—worse still—with little hope of ever working again.

I am by no means claiming that we have solved all the complex and persistent problems that lead to people living in poverty, but I argue strongly that the policies that the two Executives deployed from 1999 to 2007 resulted in significant progress being made, for example in tackling the low achievement of our poorest-performing pupils, which prevents them from making a successful transition from school to work. Health inequalities were also addressed and measures were put in place to help people overcome the barriers to entering the

employment market. As a result of such measures, and of members of this Parliament and the previous Executives working in co-operation with colleagues at Westminster, more than 8,000 children were lifted out of relative poverty in Scotland after 1999.

That is progress, but significant challenges still remain, especially if we are to play our part in achieving the UK Government's laudable objective of halving child poverty by 2010 and eradicating it by 2020. Given that the most effective way of lifting children out of poverty is to secure meaningful employment for their parents, the SNP Administration should continue to work with its ministerial counterparts at Westminster to help those who are furthest from the labour market develop skills and secure the support that is needed to get them into work and sustain them in that employment.

In its detailed briefing, the Child Poverty Action Group in Scotland acknowledges the efficacy of such an approach when it says:

"Unprecedented Scottish & UK government commitments to eradicate child poverty by 2020, and policy action, have had an impact. The number of children in poverty has decreased over the last decade".

I hope that the SNP Government considers such a commonsense approach to be worth continuing and does not allow what sometimes seems to be an instinctive animosity towards Westminster to colour its judgment and influence its actions in this most important area of Government responsibility. The cabinet secretary referred to co-operation with Westminster, but I am only slightly reassured by that, because the Government's words are often contradicted by its actions.

I will briefly raise the concerns that the Child Poverty Action Group in Scotland has voiced, which I believe to have substance. I hope that the minister will address them in his summing up.

First, we have heard from members, particularly my colleague David Whitton, about the effect that the council tax freeze will have. In David Whitton's constituency, many people occupy houses in the upper three council tax bands. However, in my constituency, which borders David Whitton's, the contrary is likely to be true, given that the majority of people live in houses in much more modest council tax bands—indeed, quite a number live in houses in the bottom three bands.

The Government is driving a council tax freeze, which will benefit those who live in houses in the top three bands most. However, poorer, more disadvantaged households will become ineligible for council tax benefit if their incomes rise a little and council tax stays the same. How will that help the very poorest of our citizens?

Secondly, given the significant additional discretion in spending that is proposed for local authorities, how will the SNP Administration ensure that the single outcome agreements clearly define expectations in relation to reducing child poverty and include mechanisms for measuring the impact of spending on child poverty levels?

Those are serious concerns. People who are still trapped in poverty deserve a detailed response from the SNP ministerial team. I hope that we hear it today and again in the future.

Tricia Marwick (Central Fife) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. About 10 minutes ago, my colleague Sandra White mentioned Scottish and Southern Energy. At that point, Mrs Helen Eadie raised a point of order in which she alleged that Mrs White had not declared that Scottish and Southern Energy had given assistance, by way of an employee, to the Scottish National Party, which the SNP had declared to the Electoral Commission.

I have since had the opportunity to check that. I assure members that the allegation is wholly untrue—there is no such entry on the Electoral Commission's register. Further, the SNP has never received an employee in kind from Scottish and Southern Energy. This is a serious matter. The allegation suggests that Mrs White was not being honest in her remarks. Presiding Officer, I ask you to invite Mrs Eadie to withdraw the allegation and to apologise to Mrs White and the rest of the Parliament.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: It is for members to ensure that they declare whether they have any interests. Ms Marwick, you have cleared up the matter; it is now a matter of record.

Tricia Marwick: Further to that point of order, Presiding Officer, I fully appreciate that it is entirely a matter for members whether they make a declaration of interests. Mrs White made no such declaration because she had nothing to declare. My point of order was that Mrs Eadie made a false allegation in the chamber. Presiding Officer, I am asking you, on behalf of the Parliament, to invite Mrs Eadie to withdraw that allegation, which is wholly without substance.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I have already said that members are responsible for statements that they make in the chamber. I cannot judge whether what you are saying is right or whether what Mrs Eadie said is right. What Mrs Eadie said is a matter for her. You have your point of order on the record.

Sandra White: Further to that point of order, Presiding Officer, the reason why I made no declaration of interests is that what Mrs Eadie alleged is completely untrue. I cannot declare an interest that does not exist. I take on board what

you are saying, Presiding Officer, but Mrs Eadie should apologise for making false accusations, which bring this Parliament into disrepute.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: It is a matter for Mrs Eadie whether she is going to apologise. I have looked at her three times and she has indicated that she is not going to do so. You have put your position on the record, Ms White.

16:34

Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): The debate has been interesting. I am not sure that some of the interventions have edified our deliberations—I am thinking of some of the earlier interventions in particular. A number of good points have been made. Ross Finnie talked about the relevance of liberty. Margaret Curran rightly talked about the centrality of social justice—I agree with her entirely. Alex Neil mentioned the relevance of fuel poverty, and Jamie Stone, Jamie McGrigor and others talked about the relevance of rural poverty.

I would like to put the issue in perspective, on behalf of the Liberal Democrats.

We live in one of the richest countries on the planet. We have shelves groaning with consumer goods, our economic indicators are heavily dependent on how successful supermarkets were in selling luxury items at Christmas and our economy is fuelled by record levels of borrowing—previously known as debt—that is now measured in trillions of pounds. Incidentally, that level of debt is now widely perceived to be a particularly malign and ominous outcome of our current Prime Minister's reign over our economic affairs. However, despite all of that, a substantial proportion of our population lives in poverty, however that is defined. In the words of the Child Poverty Action Group, that poverty

“continues to grind down the quality of children's lives and stunt their life chances.”

As Frank McAveety put it—very well—the future of those children is determined by their very first step in life. That observation and the observation of the Child Poverty Action Group contain the insight that what holds people back, reinforces poverty and restricts life chances is not just a lack of income but a cloying stratification of society, drastically dampened personal and community aspirations, dependency on things that people cannot control and, often, a sense of hopelessness and pointlessness. All of those elements are signs of a society that is under stress, with increased incidences of health and mental health problems, alcohol and drug addiction problems, antisocial activities and people's individual problems that depress the community's sense of hope and well-being and grind people down. Oddly, one issue that has not

been touched on much in this debate is multiple deprivation and its intergenerational aspects.

Margaret Curran: From Mr Brown's considered speech, can I draw the conclusion that he believes that it is vital that we continue to recognise the geography of poverty in Scotland and target resources at those areas that share multiple deprivation?

Robert Brown: I absolutely agree.

We are dealing with enormously complex issues, to which there is no magic-wand solution. Nevertheless, to its credit, the previous Government, in which the Liberal Democrats played a prominent part, worked hard on the issues. We recognised the close link between wealth creation and social justice. We reduced the number of children living in poverty from 340,000 in 1998 to 210,000, according to the Government's discussion paper. That is quite a significant achievement.

Our programme of educational reform, including our major programme of school renewals, made an impact. We believe, rightly, that educational opportunity is a central and major route out of poverty. As has been mentioned, we tackled fuel poverty and living standards, not least through the free central heating programme. There can be little doubt that those policies made a difference and that the face of Scotland in 2008 is most assuredly different from what it was in 1999, as is borne out by the phase 1 evaluation report on the closing the opportunity gap programme, which surveys the period from 2004 to 2007 and was published today.

To its credit, the SNP Government has continued many of those policies. However, there is a legitimate charge that its programme lacks coherence and goes off in the wrong direction, in some respects. Through unfocused and populist decisions, the Government has tended to dissipate the huge—indeed, unprecedented—resources that are available to it. The council tax freeze is the classic example of that. It will indeed help the better off more than it will help the worse off, and it will starve councils of resources. Over time, the situation will unwind as the budget decisions that are being made at the moment move through to actuality. The Government's plans are dependent on outcome agreements, which are an untested mechanism that has yet to be examined in detail.

Whatever the merits of providing free school meals and free prescriptions when money is no object, it is questionable whether such policies should be the top priorities when money is in short supply, and it is likely that they will divert vital resources from spending that makes a difference.

Although we can be obsessed with targets—that was occasionally a problem for the previous

Executive—the current lack of benchmarking and targets by which we can hold the SNP Government to account is highly unsatisfactory and removes a key driver of Government action.

In fairness, Nicola Sturgeon misunderstood the point that I made earlier. The reality is that the targets that are set out in paragraphs 15 and 17 of the Government's discussion paper are general.

Nicola Sturgeon: Will the member give way?

Robert Brown: I am sorry, I do not have time. I am in my final minute, which is unfortunate, because the debate is important and should be continued.

The discussion paper that the SNP Government published this morning is an elegantly written essay that echoes a number of themes. I struggle to find in it anything that is new or different from previous policies. I do not knock the process—the consultation and stakeholder events might prove useful in putting flesh on the document's rather thin bones. However, I ask the cabinet secretary whether there is value in doing what is suggested in the Liberal Democrat amendment and trying to identify a national programme of action that goes beyond the term of an individual Government, which would be more likely to make a step change over a generation. At the core of the issue are the life chances of many people—including many young people, whom Scotland needs—who are dispossessed of what should be their birthright.

We must ensure that the debate, which has been immensely worth while, is not a fleeting wisp in the night but leaves something permanent. Ross Finnie said:

"There is no liberty in poverty and inequality."

Against that background, I urge members to support the Liberal Democrat amendment.

16:41

Jackson Carlaw (West of Scotland) (Con):

The debate has been constructive, but I begin my summing up on a sour note. The part of me that is not a professional politician—the part that enjoyed a career in business—despairs of motions on poverty that in essence do nothing but say that we are against poverty, because we can all agree to that. Any set of politicians, in any country in the world, at any time in history, could have sat in a democratically elected—or not democratically elected—Parliament and considered a motion such as we are considering. Therein lies the problem. For all the expressions of dismay, resolve, fury and purpose, we are debating a motion that says that we are still against poverty. It will not be the last such motion. We are offered a public discussion—I will return to that.

On the amendments, I am at a loss as to what to make of Margaret Curran's effort. We take the view that although the language has changed, there is an essence of continuity in the new Government's approach, so the Labour amendment, which asks us to resolve that the Parliament

"regrets that the SNP's approach fails to respond to the needs of the poorest households in Scotland"

contains an implicit criticism of the previous Government, of which Mrs Curran was a member. That is a rare example of an Opposition spokesman who is so keen to score against the Government that she shoots herself in the foot.

I might have stopped at that, but for the fact that, for the second week running, Mrs Curran conjured up her bogeyman of the alleged right-wing tax-cutting alliance between the Conservatives and the SNP. Mrs Eadie and Mr Whitton also danced to that tune. There is no right-wing alliance; there is a commonsense alliance of all the parties that dismissed the reactionary and half-baked budget amendments that Labour put forward in the Finance Committee. The problem with common sense is that it is not very common. Perhaps the Presiding Officer will rule on whether Mrs Curran and her colleagues should be sent in search of some.

David Whitton: Will the member give way?

Jackson Carlaw: Mrs Scanlon detailed—

Margaret Curran: Go on, take the intervention.

Jackson Carlaw: Okay. I will take the intervention.

David Whitton: Does Mr Carlaw think that it was a commonsense policy to have 3 million unemployed people under Mrs Thatcher?

Jackson Carlaw: I was struck by Mrs Ferguson's point about John Major's Government and the economic tool of unemployment. The number of people who were unemployed when John Major left office and the number who are unemployed today varies by some degree, but are the people who are unemployed today an economic management tool for Gordon Brown and the Government at Westminster?

Ross Finnie and Robert Brown must be pleased about the forthcoming poverty powwow. They made substantial points—although Mr Finnie did so in his best television-charity-appeal voice.

Mary Scanlon talked about the stalled and, in some cases, falling uptake of key benefits that are designed to help those who are most in need, such as people who are disabled and unable to work—although many desperately hope that the world of work will be opened to them; elderly retired people, for whom a back-to-work strategy is

irrelevant; and mothers who are on their own or who have very young children, who require appropriate support for a long time.

David Whitton mentioned pensioners. We heard that as many as 40 per cent of pensioners do not claim the pension credit to which they are entitled, 40 per cent do not claim their council tax benefit and 16 per cent do not claim their housing benefit. We must increase the uptake of benefits that are needed and available. I welcome what Nicola Sturgeon said about that.

Mary Scanlon and others talked about the need to get people off welfare and into work. People too often become entangled in the safety net that used to catch them and then bounce them back. I think that all parties agree that dependency should not be assumed. However, that is not a solution in itself. Homelessness, addiction in all its forms, health inequalities and huge variation in educational attainment all feed poverty.

Fuel poverty reared its head again today. Many members have drawn our attention to the needs of the estimated 700,000 fuel-poor households. Jamie McGrigor ensured that the issue of rural poverty was heard, and Jamie Stone touched on debt, which is equally important.

As a response, the Government has published a discussion paper. We will engage in the discussion process and with initiatives to involve the business and independent sectors, although we have noted some jarring remarks in the paper, despite having had only a short time to study it. It is claimed in paragraph 45 that independence will solve poverty, as if no independent small nation has poverty, yet Mary Scanlon contradicted that point by drawing attention to the table on page 17. It is suggested that a local income tax will reduce poverty, but it will shift significant burdens on to others, who might find themselves driven into poverty as a result, to use Alex Neil's phrase.

The paper says that free prescriptions for higher-rate taxpayers will reduce poverty. Joe FitzPatrick said that that would be a progressive act, but what is progressive about a tax cut for the highest-rate taxpayers, which is what free prescriptions would be? Higher-rate taxpayers tell me that they would be happy for such money to be targeted on people who are in need. Why have a tax cut for higher-rate taxpayers, who are not in poverty, rather than target that money on the people who are in poverty and are the subject of the motion? We also need to do more to bring disadvantaged young people back into work, even while the SNP appears to be cutting the feet from under ProjectScotland.

I fear that the poverty powwow is being so touted that it will only raise unreasonable expectations of a magic solution. In the likely

absence of such a solution, we will consider and support pragmatic or substantiated radical action in this parliamentary session from wherever it is proposed, to make practical progress.

16:46

Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): I welcome the debate and the early sight of the discussion paper, but I hope that we will revisit the debate, because—try as I might—I struggled with some of the concepts and the language in which they were captured.

We are interested in the notion of an independent inquiry that the Lib Dem amendment proposes, but we wish to reflect further on that, particularly because the Local Government and Communities Committee is to move on to an inquiry into child poverty. Parliamentary committees might have a critical role at this stage, but we might want to move to the position that the Lib Dems ably presented—that will depend on the outcome of the consultation.

I regret that the Government has chosen to use language that does not sharpen the debate but which increases confusion. I felt as if I had wandered into a parallel universe of golden rules and purposes with a capital P. Opposition members have been accused of not making the transition to opposition well. It is difficult for former Government back benchers and front benchers to lose the power to make a difference to people's lives. That is made all the more difficult when the SNP—[*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am sorry, Ms Lamont; I can hear the conversation that is taking place between Ms Eadie and Dr Simpson.

Johann Lamont: The situation is all the more difficult when we see that the SNP might use the power that it has secured to reverse the significant progress that has been made on tackling poverty.

Labour members take the fundamental position that we have a contract on economic growth and shared prosperity—we need both. We acknowledge the challenges in making funding decisions. We know that a balance must be struck between spending in general and spending that is targeted on poor people to address poverty. However, when that balance has been set, it is dishonest to conflate the results and imply that general spending addresses the needs of the poor. Spending money generally on prescription charges may be good, but the Government should not pretend that that measure addresses poverty, because those who are in poverty will not benefit specifically from it.

We believe that we should build the economy and share the prosperity and that we need

Government action to intervene to support people who are further away from economic benefit—those who are most excluded. Addressing poverty and exclusion must be at the core of our business. Nothing happens by chance—action is required.

I was interested that Sandra White said that the SNP led the first debate on poverty in the Parliament. The SNP drops the term “social justice” and then says that Labour did not debate poverty because we called it social justice. Where is the logic in that argument? The SNP’s problem is that addressing poverty and delivering social justice are not at the Government’s core.

I have said before that assertion is not fact. If it were, the Government would not have as one of its key priorities an untested and unconditional business rates cut with nothing in return, no matter how much the Tories view such a cut as common sense. It would not have prioritised securing an early agreement on a council tax freeze, even if such a freeze were very important, without moving at a pace that gave confidence to groups that rely on local government funding. SNP members may believe in a concordat with local government, but they should have ensured proper engagement and the development of social outcomes and agreements in order not to end up with a series of national indicators but not one word about disability, for example. We will not get people, including people with disabilities, into work if we do not fund an employability strategy. Equally, if the Government was committed to tackling poverty—if doing so was at the core of its work—it would recognise that different groups experience poverty differently. Women, for example, experience poverty differently. Consequently, the Government would not have a budget that does not assess the gender or equality impact of spend.

What does the Government claim that it will do? There are the three golden rules: cohesion, solidarity and sustainability. As we wrestle with being in opposition, I challenge SNP back benchers in particular. They must make a transition and take on the responsibilities of government. In today’s *Daily Telegraph*, Alan Cochrane tellingly described SNP back benchers as “creepily loyal”. I have waited in the hope that he would be proved wrong, but there is no greater evidence that he is right than what has been said in this debate—or what was said in the budget debate.

The SNP’s back benches have many people on them now who were not here during the previous eight years and it looks like the new SNP is in the grip of those who believe robustly in the politics of trickle-down economics. They seem to have silenced the more radical elements in their own ranks—indeed, I am beginning to think that somebody has taken over Alex Neil’s body. I cite

in my defence the fact that SNP colleagues dallied in alliance with the Greens and the Scottish Socialist Party over many years and condemned us for not spending enough money or taking enough action to address poverty. In my extensive research, I have not found one recent clarion call by the SNP on such questions. I have never heard the chant, “What do we want? The cohesion golden rule. When do we want it? Now.”

No matter how cynical about the SNP’s underlying commitment to addressing poverty, disability and disadvantage I have imagined myself to be, I never in my wildest dreams imagined that the same colleagues who apparently support cuts in spending on antipoverty measures would end the sharing of the benefits of economic prosperity—the distribution of jobs to other parts of the country—or that they would support business rates cuts worth £265 million without one condition. I thought that SNP back benchers might effectively lobby behind closed doors to secure changes in the budget. However, John Swinney has not only supported unconditional business rates cuts but accelerated those cuts to secure his budget—and SNP back benchers are silent.

I say gently to SNP back benchers that, although we are learning to wrestle with being in opposition, they need to find their voice. Organisations trying to address poverty deserve to know that, even if it is not applied publicly, pressure will be applied privately to ensure that the needs of the poor are addressed and that things are not simply asserted, but delivered. If that does not happen, the serious charge can be made that the language of social justice, inclusion, equality and tackling poverty was used to secure votes, but that addressing such matters is not the principle that drives the use of the power that was entrusted to the SNP at the elections. SNP back benchers must find a voice to ensure that those who want what has been seen as a commonsense deal with the Tories are not allowed to have their way. We know that trickle-down economics does not work and that in order to tackle poverty, people must make a difference, rather than headlines. A partnership with the Government at every level must be pledged. We hear a lot about what is not being done by others. We want to hear what the Government will do—with local and UK organisations that have expressed concerns—to ensure that a shift occurs, that the SNP’s commitment to tackling poverty and deprivation is reasserted, and that the progress that has already been made is built on.

16:54

The Minister for Communities and Sport (Stewart Maxwell): I thank colleagues for taking

part in what has been a stimulating and—often—constructive debate on a subject of the utmost importance for the Scotland that we want to build for future generations. In adding to what the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing said in her opening speech, I will say a few words about some crucial aspects of what we propose. Before I do that, I welcome the warm welcome that the Poverty Alliance, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and Save the Children gave to the proposals that we published today.

We have made it clear that we want to focus on three broad areas for action. First and foremost is tackling the root causes of poverty, by intervening early and preventing the problems that give rise to it. That means giving children the best start in the early years and at school, improving poor health, moving people who can work towards and into work, breaking patterns of reoffending, and addressing the discriminatory attitudes that underlie much poverty.

Secondly, we want to focus on lifting people who are in poverty out of poverty, through more and better employment that does not simply create a class of working poor, by making people more resilient, by improving the provision of advice and information, and by helping vulnerable people through key transitions in their lives.

Thirdly, we want to alleviate the impact of poverty on people's lives by maximising their income and reducing their costs. That is why we want to legislate to extend the entitlement to free school meals to all children of parents or carers in receipt of maximum child tax credit and maximum working tax credit. We have also pledged to abolish the unfair council tax and to introduce a fairer local income tax based on ability to pay.

In implementing our plans on poverty, we want to build connections with the whole of Scottish society. The fact that almost 900,000 Scots live in poverty is a shocking statistic that should be of concern to all Scots, not only those who are affected by poverty or those who work with people in poverty, but those in higher-income households, in the business sector and in public services.

A healthy society is one where the better off feel compassion for and solidarity with those who are disadvantaged. We want to build a commitment among Scotland's people that everybody has a role to play in enabling Scotland to overcome poverty and inequality. Our conviction is that Scotland can never fully succeed as long as so many of its people are unable to contribute to that success. During the forthcoming dialogue, we will be seeking views on how best to communicate on those issues with the whole of Scottish society.

I emphasise the crucial role of the third sector in helping us to deliver on our ambitions. The third

sector can help us to reach individuals in poverty because it enjoys a level of trust with vulnerable people that the state often struggles to achieve. We see great potential for social enterprises to deliver both services and employment for disadvantaged people, generating income and business success in some of our poorest areas. The third sector can help to design better public services that have a good feel for the needs of clients, while also acting as compelling advocates for the aspirations and concerns of our most vulnerable communities and individuals. It is important to work with the third sector as a full partner in a public discussion on poverty and in developing our framework for delivery and we are working with the Poverty Alliance on that. We have asked the alliance to oversee an exercise that will specifically engage with those in poverty as part of the forthcoming dialogue on poverty.

Members raised a number of important issues in the debate, and I wish to get through as many of them as I can in the time that I have available. Margaret Curran talked about ending child poverty by 2020. We share that ambition. We have said clearly that it is our aim to work with the UK Government to ensure that we end child poverty by 2020.

Margaret Curran: Will the member take an intervention?

Stewart Maxwell: Certainly.

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): Before I call Margaret Curran, I point out that there is too much background noise in the chamber.

Margaret Curran: Could the minister confirm that the target that we had for 2010 will still be part of the framework that the Government is proposing?

Stewart Maxwell: Absolutely. I think that the cabinet secretary confirmed that very point in her opening speech.

Margaret Curran went on to speak about the language of antipoverty initiatives. I will quote from a very obvious source. The document that we published today could not be any clearer. It is "A Discussion Paper on Tackling Poverty, Inequality and Deprivation in Scotland". That is clear language about what we want to do. We want to tackle poverty, and not talk about the frippery of language use that Labour members were discussing.

Labour members also referred to budgets, but there have been no cuts to budgets. A record-breaking amount of money is going to local government and into the public sector in the next three years. As the cabinet secretary pointed out, there is £435 million over the next three years in the fairer Scotland fund.

However, I agree that the Government will cut some things. We will cut the tax on ill health by cutting the prescription charges faced by many people. We will cut the tax on fixed incomes that many suffer from, particularly pensioners, by scrapping the outdated and unfair council tax and introducing a tax based on the ability to pay.

There was an accusation of a lack of focus in our work. The allocations in the fairer Scotland fund are based on the most deprived 15 per cent in Scotland, using the 2006 Scottish index of multiple deprivation.

Malcolm Chisholm: Surely if there is no cash increase in the communities regeneration fund over the next three years, that has to be a real-terms cut.

Stewart Maxwell: There are additional funds going into local government and a range of areas. Not only that, by bringing seven funding streams together into a single funding stream, as recommended by the Finance Committee, we will reduce bureaucracy and the time that individual groups spend on applying for funding stream after funding stream rather than getting on with tackling poverty.

Mary Scanlon talked about the increasing rates of poverty in Denmark and other small countries. Those rates are still much lower than the rates of poverty in Scotland. Those countries are independent and we are not; they have the full powers to tackle the problem and we do not.

The Presiding Officer: Order. Let me repeat that there are still too many conversations going on.

Stewart Maxwell: Thank you, Presiding Officer.

Mary Scanlon also mentioned benefit take-up rates. As the cabinet secretary outlined, we will work with the Department for Work and Pensions on that and in the spring we will be launching a policy on benefit take-up rates, specifically for pensioners.

Ross Finnie said that rates of poverty have fallen. We recognise that there has been a change in the past few years, but all that has happened is that some people have moved from just one side of the poverty line to just the other side. That is not good enough. He also talked about fuel poverty, which doubled in Scotland between 2002 and 2006. We all accept that some excellent programmes have been put in place, including the warm deal and the central heating programme, in trying to secure warm homes for pensioners in particular. Frankly, however, those programmes will not work on their own. Without powers over taxation, benefits and all the other matters that allow us to tackle poverty, we will always struggle

and, as Joe FitzPatrick rightly pointed out, we will have one hand tied behind our back.

The debate has focused on a subject of the greatest significance for all in public life and beyond. I ask members to support the Government motion, which calls for

“the creation of a fairer Scotland”

in which all our citizens can truly flourish.

Point of Order

17:03

Tricia Marwick (Central Fife) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I truly regret having to raise this as a point of order. Earlier today, Mrs Helen Eadie accused Mrs Sandra White of not having declared an interest. I raised that as a point of order with the Deputy Presiding Officer, whom I invited to invite Mrs Eadie to withdraw the accusation, which was wholly without foundation.

Presiding Officer, I do not have to tell you that to be accused of failing to register an interest is a serious matter. I ask you therefore to reflect on the *Official Report* of today's meeting and to consider what was said without foundation and the points of order that I made. Will you consider referring the matter to the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee to allow a judgment to be made? Members have a qualified privilege in the chamber, but they cannot be allowed to make accusations about another member and, when they are shown that those accusations are false, neither withdraw them nor apologise to the other member and to the chamber.

Presiding Officer, will you reflect on the situation, take the matter further and have it dealt with in the manner in which it should be dealt?

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): First, let me say that I consider that point of order to be a challenge to a ruling that has already been given from the chair. I do not welcome that.

There are serious issues involved, but the register of interests is a matter not for the Presiding Officer but for the code of conduct. The matter has been ruled on and I strongly suggest that we move on.

Decision Time

17:05

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): There are 12 questions to be put as a result of today's business. I remind members that, in relation to the debate on poverty, if the amendment in the name of Margaret Curran is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Ross Finnie will fall. I will remind members of that again when we get there.

The first question is, that amendment S3M-1246.2, in the name of Alison McInnes, which seeks to amend motion S3M-1246, in the name of Des McNulty, on accessible passenger transport and the national concessionary fares scheme, 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)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (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)
 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)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (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)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 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)
 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)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 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)
 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)
 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)
 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)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 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)
 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)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)

Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (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 58, Against 63, Abstentions 1.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S3M-1246.1.1, in the name of Alex Johnstone, which seeks to amend amendment S3M-1246.1, in the name of Patrick Harvie, on accessible passenger transport and the national concessionary fares scheme, 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)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 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)
 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)
 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)
 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)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 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)
 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)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (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

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)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (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)
 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)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (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)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 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)
 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)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (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 65, Against 56, Abstentions 1.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S3M-1246.1, in the name of Patrick Harvie, as amended, which seeks to amend motion S3M-1246, in the name of Des McNulty, 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)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 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)
 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)
 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)
 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)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

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)
 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)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (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

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)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (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)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marilyn (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)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (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)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 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)
 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)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (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 65, Against 56, Abstentions 1.

Amendment, as amended, agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S3M-1246, in the name of Des McNulty, on accessible passenger transport and the national concessionary fares scheme, 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)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 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)
 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)
 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)
 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)

McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 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)
 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)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (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

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)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (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)
 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)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (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)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 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)
 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)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (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 65, Against 56, Abstentions 1.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Parliament notes the importance of accessible passenger transport to achieving the Scottish Government's climate change objectives and in tackling the significant inequalities in Scottish society; recognises that it is vital that accessible and affordable public transport is available to help the Scottish Government to meet its climate change objectives and to ensure the continuation of vital urban and rural services; calls on the Scottish Government to provide a substantial increase in the budget for the Bus Service Operators Grant in 2008-09 and to consider keeping fares more affordable for the longer term; notes the Scottish Government's intention to review the national concessionary travel scheme, and calls on ministers during that review to ensure that they maximise the benefits for the public throughout Scotland while guaranteeing the best return on a scheme which represents a significant investment of public money and notes that Labour and Liberal Democrat ministers in the previous administration chose not to grant eligibility to disabled people in receipt of the lower rate of disability allowance and to older and disabled people using community transport in rural areas when they created the National Concessionary Fares Scheme."

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S3M-1258.1.1, in the name of Maureen Watt, which seeks to amend amendment S3M-1258.1, in the name of Elizabeth Smith, on education, 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)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 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)
 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)
 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)
 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)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 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)
 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)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (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

Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)

ABSTENTIONS

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)
 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)
 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)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (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)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 65, Against 13, Abstentions 44.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S3M-1258.1, in the name of Elizabeth Smith, as amended, which seeks to amend motion S3M-1258, in the name of Rhona Brankin, on education, 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)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 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)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 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)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 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)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (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)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMahan, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 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)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)

Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)
 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)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 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)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

AGAINST

Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)

ABSTENTIONS

MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 109, Against 12, Abstentions 1.

Amendment, as amended, agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S3M-1258.2, in the name of Jeremy Purvis, which seeks to amend motion S3M-1258, in the name of Rhona Brankin, on education, 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)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (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)
 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)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (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)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 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)
 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)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 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)
 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)
 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)
 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)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 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)
 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)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (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 55, Against 63, Abstentions 3.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S3M-1258, in the name of Rhona Brankin, on education, 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)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 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)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 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)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 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)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (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)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)

Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)
 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)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 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)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

ABSTENTIONS

Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 108, Against 0, Abstentions 13.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Parliament recognises the importance of high-quality school buildings to young people's learning; and the need for energy efficiency, quality design including the incorporation of sound ecological and sustainable design principles, and value for money for the public purse in building schools; recognises the need for the Scottish Government and local authorities to continue to improve Scotland's school estate; notes the SNP's commitment to match the previous administration's proposed school building programme "brick for brick", and calls on the Scottish Government to make a statement to the Parliament detailing its plans for new schools and how these will be funded; and further notes that future plans for school buildings will be usefully informed by the imminent publication of Audit Scotland's report on improving the Scottish school estate and the Scottish Government's proposals for the Scottish Futures Trust and the Infrastructure Investment Plan.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S3M-1260.2, in the name of Margaret Curran, which seeks to amend motion S3M-1260, in the name of Nicola Sturgeon, on

poverty, be agreed to. I remind members that if the amendment is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Ross Finnie falls. 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)
 Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marilyn (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)
 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)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (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)
 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)
 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)
 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)
 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)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 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)
 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)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (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

Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 43, Against 66, Abstentions 13.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S3M-1260.1, in the name of Mary Scanlon, which seeks to amend motion S3M-1260, in the name of Nicola Sturgeon, on poverty, 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)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 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)
 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)
 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)
 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)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 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)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (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

Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)

ABSTENTIONS

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)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (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)
 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)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 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)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 65, Against 3, Abstentions 54.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S3M-1260.3, in the name of Ross Finnie, which seeks to amend motion S3M-1260, in the name of Nicola Sturgeon, on poverty, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)

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)
 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)
 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)
 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)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 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)

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)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (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

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)
 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)
 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)
 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)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 13, Against 63, Abstentions 46.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S3M-1260, in the name of Nicola Sturgeon, on poverty, 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)
 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)
 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)
 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)
 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)
 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)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)

Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (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

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)
 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)
 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)
 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)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 75, Against 46, Abstentions 0.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Parliament agrees that poverty, inequality and deprivation are among the greatest challenges to be faced

in Scotland today, that tackling these challenges is core to the delivery of the Government Economic Strategy and that development of a framework for taking forward these aspects of the Government Economic Strategy will contribute to the creation of a fairer Scotland, recognises that the Scottish Government, UK Government and local governments need to work together to get people off welfare and into work where possible and to increase the percentage of benefit take-up ensuring that those most in need of help get it, and calls on the Scottish Government to bring forward proposals to achieve these aims.

Outdoor Education

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): The final item of business today is a members' business debate on motion S3M-765, in the name of Elizabeth Smith, on extra-curricular outdoor education for every school pupil.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament notes the vital contribution that taking part in extra-curricular activities makes in developing our young people; notes that extra-curricular programmes help our young people to learn new skills, to enjoy new responsibility, to appreciate the work of other people and to learn about leadership; notes the success of projects such as Crieff High School's Community Awareness Project, and considers that, in an age when too many of our young people are in the headlines for the wrong reasons and when there are increasing concerns about school discipline and the numbers of youngsters involved in incidents of antisocial behaviour, extra-curricular activities in schools and five days outdoor education for every school pupil in Scotland should be supported.

17:19

Elizabeth Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife)
(Con): Earlier this month, the chamber debated the educational challenges that confront Scottish schools. It was an important debate for all sorts of reasons, but perhaps most of all for one question that went largely unreported. I hope that the focus of today's debate will be that question: what is education for?

Today, I choose to praise the contributions to that earlier debate made by Robin Harper, Margo MacDonald and Peter Peacock, each of whom, in their different ways, dealt with the intrinsic values of education—an issue that I discussed originally with the headteacher at Crieff high school. In the difficult and, perhaps, perplexing quest for the answer to that question, we need to stand back and ask ourselves from an holistic perspective what we should expect our schools to do.

I believe that extra-curricular activity—which is perhaps better named co-curricular activity—with all its many definitions, should be an integral part of the process. That view is not popular in some quarters. After all, extra-curricular activity is not measurable in the same way as the scores in a maths test or the A passes that the Scottish Qualifications Authority awards are. There is no national framework for such activity, which often appears on a school timetable only because of the personal and voluntary interests of an enthusiastic member of staff, not because it has been forced on the school by the strictures of the normal curriculum. Extra-curricular activity is often time consuming and irregular in terms of time allocation, and it does not lend itself to inclusion in league tables. Thank goodness for that, as I do not believe that such activity can or should be

condemned to obsessive quantitative measurement.

Extra-curricular activities can be more important and more enriching than what I dare to call the run-of-the-mill education in the classroom, important though that is. I believe firmly that part of that quality is the deeply personal experience that the individuals who take part in it encounter. Some of my most rewarding days as a teacher were spent many miles away from the classroom, on the mountains beside Loch Ossian or in Wester Ross, working with children who had been taken well outside their comfort zone—I, too, was outside my comfort zone—and learning how to survive in an environment that was totally alien but richly educative. There are many thousands of teachers in Scotland just like me.

In the build-up to this debate, I was privileged to receive a huge response from the many groups and schools who do outstanding work in the area. I take this opportunity, as I did when I submitted their names to the press this morning, to put on record the debt that the Parliament and all Scotland owes them for the work they do, especially with children who may be denied such opportunities elsewhere.

It is impossible in seven minutes to do justice to all of that work, but I will summarise the essential qualities that it brings. It enables young people to take decisions in difficult situations, builds confidence and self-esteem, helps them to understand what commitment and responsibility mean, teaches them to work in teams—which is not always the most popular theme these days but is fundamental to the successful development of young people's skills—and, perhaps most important of all, allows them to start out on the journey of finding their inner selves. The groups that help children in that way do as much for our young people's social and spiritual well-being as anything else, which is a priceless asset in this day and age.

I have lodged the motion for the simple reason that I do not believe that enough of our youngsters are able to experience such activities and that many of those who do are unable to experience them for a prolonged period, when the benefits are at their greatest. Whether the school that someone attends offers such opportunities is often a lottery; extra-curricular activity does not feature as a top priority for far too many people in education officialdom.

I understand why. There is no doubt that one of the most damaging influences on such activity is the increasing reluctance of teachers, especially headteachers, to take responsibility for ensuring that pupils are able to participate in it. We are told that the risks are far too great and that the effort is not worth it, if one considers the mountain of

paperwork and potential litigation that goes with it. My extensive questioning of those involved suggests that, sadly, that has become a major issue. I have great sympathy for them, but it will be an indictment of education if we decide that there is nothing we can do about the matter. Have we really arrived at the stage of allowing political correctness and the doom merchants to override our logic and deep-rooted educational values?

I fully appreciate that there is no easy answer, but I believe that, as well as encouraging all headteachers to ensure that they have a diverse and extensive extra-curricular programme in their schools, we as parliamentarians have an obligation to ensure that the legislation that covers risk is as simple and straightforward, and as supportive, as possible. We need clear guidelines that are based on common sense rather than bureaucracy. Above all, they should be based on the good practice of practitioners rather than of civil servants or people who have never been out on a hill or in a canoe. One of the difficulties that we face when it comes to extra-curricular activity is that that has often not been the case.

The Scottish National Party manifesto made it clear that the Government believes that every child has the opportunity to experience the extra-curricular domain. As a politician who is a former teacher, I am passionate about the responsibilities that we have in that regard. With the exciting prospects that the curriculum for excellence offers, we now have the opportunity to enshrine such activities in the curriculum for every young person in Scotland, and I firmly believe that we can do so at a relatively low cost.

As I said in my opening remarks, extra-curricular activities are worth their weight in gold when it comes to what real education is all about. Depriving pupils of that experience deprives Scotland of the ability to make the best use of the undoubted talents of our young people. As parliamentarians, we have an obligation to do something about that state of affairs.

17:26

Roseanna Cunningham (Perth) (SNP): I apologise in advance for needing to leave the chamber before the end of the debate, which I congratulate Liz Smith on securing. She has provided a welcome reminder of how useful it is that many members bring extensive expertise to the Parliament's business.

I am sure that everyone will agree on the importance of extra-curricular activities in providing the rounded education that our children need and the health benefits that come from being out of doors.

The motion mentions the community awareness project that is run by Crieff high school in my

constituency, in the town in which I live. I am delighted to have the opportunity to echo Liz Smith's praise for the people behind the project—which is essentially about building links between school and community—and, in particular, the young people who are making it a success. I am confident that the community of Crieff will respond to the pupils' efforts and I look forward to more local businesses getting involved in helping the project.

As I have mentioned the extra-curricular activities of Crieff high school, I am sure that other members will agree that now is an appropriate time to pay tribute to the actions of the three young Crieff pupils on a school skiing trip in the French Alps who saved the life of their ski instructor when he was involved in a fall. Fifth-year pupils Jamie Henry, Bruce Coull and Alex Wilson showed great composure and resourcefulness after their instructor was injured. They are a credit to their families, their school and their town. Without their actions, the situation could have become much more serious. Given that young people are often vilified in the public domain, we should remember young people such as those three boys.

Crieff high school is not unique, of course. The dedication of teachers means that most schools will provide a range of outdoor extra-curricular activities that allow pupils to engage positively with local and global communities. For example, David Gardner and Mari Evans, two senior pupils at St Columba's high school in Perth, have recently returned from India, where they visited the Association of People with Disability in Bangalore. Pupils from St Columba's were chosen to participate in the trip because of the school's years of continued support for that project, for which it has raised more than £30,000.

The community school of Auchterarder has been designated as an integrated community school, which means that it aims, through partnership with a variety of agencies, to achieve closer involvement with local communities and to provide precisely the more co-ordinated and holistic approach that Liz Smith talked about. I should also mention that Perth high school has been taking part in the John Muir awards scheme, the slogan of which is, "Discover, Explore, Conserve, Share". Nothing as exciting as that was ever available to me when I was at high school.

Far too often, the image that we have of our young folk is of a disenchanted, disengaged youth who hang around the streets smoking and drinking and causing nuisance and vandalism. The truth is far from that stereotype.

We tend of necessity to concentrate on the things that are wrong, because we are concerned with trying to fix them and put them right.

Unfortunately, such a focus can sometimes mask the fact that by far the vast majority of our young people are extremely decent, conscientious and concerned human beings who are determined to be useful members of society. Indeed, we have seen some examples already this afternoon.

17:30

Mary Mulligan (Linlithgow) (Lab): I congratulate Elizabeth Smith on securing this debate and thank her for her kind comments about my colleague Peter Peacock, who sends his apologies for not being able to be present this evening. She is absolutely right to say that outdoor education is important in ensuring that all our children and young people have a fully rounded educational experience. I also thank those who have provided us with briefings, particularly Peter Higgins, who has made a major contribution to this debate.

Outdoor education clearly has many benefits, including showing children how to work in co-operation, how to assess risks and how to develop their knowledge and understanding of our environment. Moreover, as members have pointed out, it is also socially inclusive and allows children to take part according to their abilities.

Forest schools have been mentioned, but I want to highlight an example of such a school in my constituency. In September 2004, staff from Forestry Commission Scotland and Falla Hill primary school in Fauldhouse started a forest school with primary 6 and primary 7 children. It involved regular visits, usually one day a week, to a local wood over an extended period. The idea behind a forest school is what it suggests—it is a school located in the forest—and, in building on mainstream education, it provides a different, enjoyable and child rather than content-led approach to the delivery of curriculum as well as carefully structured outdoor learning delivered through first-hand experience in a natural habitat.

The results show positive changes in the children's attitude and behaviour. More important, parents' support for the forest school has been very positive. Indeed, the concept is now being extended to other schools in Fauldhouse and the fact that, as an ex-mining village, it is still dealing with certain economic challenges has not prevented the children from experiencing and benefiting from outdoor education.

Linlithgow's Low Port centre, which is administered by West Lothian Council and is in a more prosperous part of my constituency, is considered to be one of Scotland's premier outdoor centres. For more than 30 years, it has organised outdoor activities such as sailing, kayaking, canoeing, windsurfing, climbing, biking

and multi-activities. Indeed, anything one can care to name, the centre seems to cater for, and all the courses are graded to suit a range of ages and abilities. Moreover, the centre continues to work with excluded and disadvantaged children. For example, it is looking forward to forging a positive partnership with Donaldson's College.

There are questions about how we can involve every child in such activities, but I will finish by highlighting a couple of other challenges. The first involves finance. I hope that the local example I cited shows that it is not necessary to spend a lot of money on travelling to foreign places to have a meaningful outdoor experience. The outdoors are all around us, but I suggest to the minister that Governments and councils must provide adequate resources if children are to use them in this way.

Secondly, as Elizabeth Smith said, we need to think about safety issues. The fact is that we have become risk averse. Moreover, we do not want our children to take risks. Although I would never want to put my children or anyone else's children at risk, we do them a disservice if we do not allow them to take calculated risks. We must ensure that the people who are with them are properly trained and able to assess such matters. It is only by doing so that we can ensure that our young people can grow into the adults that we wish them to be.

17:34

Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): As other members have done, I congratulate Elizabeth Smith on lodging her excellent and relevant motion, which is one of the best that we have had for a members' business debate for some time, and on making a very good speech. I, too, pay tribute to the people who support outdoor and extra-curricular activities in education and youth work.

The debate raises many key issues, including the nature and purpose of education, which Elizabeth Smith touched on; the most effective ways of including all children; how we inculcate a sense of place in children; and, as many members have mentioned, how we deal with our risk-averse society.

I was particularly struck by the Woodland Trust's observation in its briefing that

"just as green space is free at the point of delivery for health benefits, it is also available for education."

Against that background, I will touch on three issues.

The first is the importance of protecting green space, which was often handed down to us by far-sighted forebears and philanthropists but which is often under threat from developers, from philistine—if there is such a word—councillors or

from public neglect. It is time we considered a modern common good law that would protect our heritage, set limits on what councils, as trustees of our parks, can do in our name and develop a more dynamic philosophy of the public interest in key natural assets.

The second issue is facilities. There is a place for unorganised play, but in our risk-averse society we must build, preserve and organise outdoor education facilities. We have the considerable assets that are run by local authorities, the Scottish Youth Hostels Association, the Scottish Environmental and Outdoor Education Centres Association, the Scout Association and others. They can provide the resources and the expertise that can reassure parents and guarantee high standards. However, we must ensure that we know what exists, that we use the resources fully and that they contribute fully to our bank of social assets.

The third issue is play and communication. I read somewhere—I think that it was from I Can—that 50 per cent of children who start school cannot communicate properly. The play opportunities of outdoor education and other extra-curricular activities can make an incalculable contribution to overcoming such a restricted start in life. When I was the Deputy Minister for Education and Young People, I visited Denmark to see its education system; I visited a nature kindergarten some distance outside Copenhagen, which was attended by children with additional support needs and other children. The day on which we went was particularly cold and miserable and I must say that the children looked distinctly underwhelmed by the experience. However, the concept of nature kindergartens—the idea that being outdoors in all weathers is natural and beneficial—is widespread in the Nordic countries and is successful.

I ask the minister for a commitment from the Government on several fronts. First, I ask the Government to recognise and support the importance of first-class facilities and of the organisations that provide and run such facilities and provide expertise. Secondly, I seek a commitment to tackle barriers to outdoor learning, whether the barrier is the cost of courses, the restraints of the curriculum, the need for expertise or the drawbacks of a risk-averse approach and the need for guidance. Young people need challenge and excitement and they need to experience risks and have the opportunity to show leadership. Thirdly, I ask the Government to ensure that all young people can access the opportunities. As Elizabeth Smith mentioned, we should see those opportunities as being universal, as schools are universal, even if we need targeted provision for some young people who have specific needs and challenges.

Connection to the world around, having a sense of place and having opportunities to explore, develop and learn are central to widening the life chances of many young people. Young people are our future—they are the people who will change our world. Extra-curricular activities give huge opportunities for personal development, to build leadership qualities and resilience, to widen horizons and to learn new skills and taste new interests. They add to CVs and to informal learning, which complements more formal provision in the education system. I enthusiastically support Elizabeth Smith's excellent motion.

17:38

Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): I, too, thank Elizabeth Smith for bringing the debate to Parliament. She knows, as do many members who are present, that I am as passionate as she is about outdoor education. At every opportunity in the past eight and a half years in debates on education, I have tried to bring the issue to members' attention.

I will expand a little on the reasons why outdoor education is such a good thing. As Elizabeth Smith said, it provides benefits that cannot and should not be measured. I thank Dave Spence, who heads the Scottish Environmental and Outdoor Education Centres Association, for providing a list of 13 ways in which children develop through outdoor education. They develop confidence and the ability to make decisions in the face of complex and daunting challenges. They gain motivation, which leads to an increased likelihood of their being successful learners, and they learn positive attitudes to problem solving. They develop resilience, tenacity, determination and adaptability, which so many employers want. They develop an understanding of risk, risk assessment and risk management and they gain creativity and the ability to initiate and be receptive to innovation. They develop knowledge and appreciation of healthy and more active lifestyles, the ability to reflect on their potential and their contribution to society, which is so important, and an appreciation of others and their place, contribution and potential in the world, which relates to responsible citizenship. They also develop teamworking skills, strong communication skills, leadership qualities and the ability to delegate, which makes them effective contributors. My goodness—every single child in Scottish education could benefit from those qualities.

Such education should not be restricted to those who can afford it. Only the other night, a television programme about Easterhouse showed that the experience of 16-year-olds in gangs could extend no further than the 13 streets of which they had

control. That is their environment; that is all they live in. We have got to get our children out into the environment.

I want to follow up on Robert Brown's entreaties on what the Government should be doing, and to follow up on what Elizabeth Smith said about gathering together people who are engaged in outdoor education to see how we can make progress. I would love to be involved; I was once an outdoor educator.

Making progress need not be incredibly expensive. Dave Spence has given us outline figures that suggest that the roughly 50,000 children in each year's cohort in primary schools in Scotland could all get five days of outdoor education for about £8 million. The education system does not normally provide lodging and food for free, so it would be quite reasonable to expect the parents to pay for lodging and food, in which case the cost to the state would be reduced to £3 million. In the great scheme of things, when we consider the benefits to young people, that figure is absolute pennies. That sort of thing should be our starter, but we should be looking much further.

In the 1970s, every school in Lothian Region had an outdoor education teacher. Benmore outdoor education centre is still going and I pay tribute to all the people there for the wonderful work that they do. If the City of Edinburgh Council in its wisdom is thinking of reducing the centre's funding, it should not be. Benmore should be getting more funding.

I hope that the minister will respond positively to the debate, so that we can all take the issue much further over the coming months.

17:43

Jim Hume (South of Scotland) (LD): I, too, congratulate Elizabeth Smith on securing tonight's important debate. The benefits of outdoor activities and education to young people are many. They help with good health, increase self-esteem, develop the brain and open up the imagination of young people.

Capitalising on children's curiosity at primary school age as a learning motivator is not complicated—brains are designed to learn. By providing young children with experiences, we give learning potential a helping hand. As the Lib Dem environment spokesman, I want to focus on that subject.

Through learning through play in places such as nature kindergartens, which Robert Brown mentioned, children figure out not only how the world works but how it can work for them. Nature kindergartens on the continent have even been

used successfully to help the children of drug addicts. Frau Kutsch's project in Germany, fully supported by Chancellor Merkel, celebrates its 10th anniversary this year. We have a lot to learn from such projects. In the south, campaigner Sibylle Alexander has fought for many years for nature kindergartens to become part of our national curriculum, and I have full sympathy with that.

I was lucky enough to be brought up in the country. Being 12 miles from the nearest town I may have missed out on being able just to go down the park to play football with my mates, but I had the benefit of living with nature all around and, of course, of understanding it fairly well. However, this past generation has changed. A distance has appeared between urban and rural lives; no longer do most urban kids have a relation who works on the land and understands it. It is therefore up to us to ensure that the gap is bridged.

It is not always possible to take kids out to the environment, but it is possible to bring the environment to the kids. Among many other innovative projects, Borders Forest Trust, which works throughout the south of Scotland, runs a successful playground initiative—I declare that I am a past trustee. The initiative encourages school kids to plan and fund their own playgrounds that include indigenous trees and furniture made with local craftsmen under another initiative called butts to benches, in which local wood is made into highly imaginative pieces of furniture. If anyone is interested, they can see a red squirrel shaped bench, leaf shaped benches and even one in the shape of a dolphin. Those playgrounds, of which there are 35 to date, can also include wildlife gardens, ponds, sensory plantings, special needs gardens and murals. All of them are different and all are fired by the children's imagination, which is in turn fired by the initiative. That project is proven to improve understanding of the environment, increase urban green space and raise awareness of local issues.

As Liberal Democrat environment spokesman and a South of Scotland MSP, my focus in this debate has rightly been on the benefits that the south has derived from environmental outdoor education, with some local initiatives from which all should benefit—urban and rural. That is echoed in Elizabeth Smith's motion. Understanding our environment better, learning new skills, seeing a lump of wood turn into a dolphin shaped bench and acorns grow into great oaks can only better prepare kids for an holistic understanding of the planet on which we live. Parliament must learn from existing good practice and push for further environmental education to enhance understanding of how we can all make a positive difference to the places where we live and for our future generations.

17:46

Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind): I thank Elizabeth Smith for lodging the motion and for the kind words at the start of her speech.

I will concentrate on what I know most about—physical education—and talk about the big, beefy sports, such as high-level walking, climbing, orienteering and mountain biking. I will link them to a particular interest of mine: trying to recruit from the ranks of people whom we stupidly describe as NEETs—those not in education, employment or training—thus categorising them in a pejorative fashion. A great number of young people from the ranks of those who are not in education and who perhaps did not find school a satisfactory experience could be recruited because of their skills in sports, usually football. They are the sort of people who, if they were encouraged to gain certification from the governing bodies of sport—this goes for all sports because, once somebody is into one, they are into umpteen—could work with children from Easterhouse, for example, in outdoor physical education. That would be worth trying, so I would like a pilot or two to be attempted. It would not cost much money.

Money is one of the things that holds back programmes and implementation of the intention behind the motion. Local authorities might take up the sort of ideas that they took up in the 1970s and to which Robin Harper referred, but they say that they are strapped for cash, so they are unlikely to spend a lot of money on such initiatives. However, they could declutter the school timetable. The terms “outdoor education” and “extra-curricular” imply somehow that such activities will be done outwith the school day, but such education should be incorporated into the school day or the school week. Local authorities should be helped to declutter their timetables to achieve that.

Robin Harper: The extraordinary thing is that, in the 1970s and 1980s, there were more young people in education and less was spent on it but we still found the money for outdoor education. Now, we have fewer pupils, more money, but no outdoor education.

Margo MacDonald: I reiterate my points about where we might find coaches to take young people in hand and how we might find time for them to do that.

Robin Harper referred to Glenmore lodge. I was there—not as a school pupil but as a physical education student—and have never forgotten the experience. I had to write a diary at the end of the stay. When I look at it now, I cannot believe that I was that person and that I derived from it what I did. It was a wonderful experience. I remember doing high-level walking and passing Utsi's reindeer. They were going down the hill because

they knew what we did not know—a storm was coming. We were all nipping over corries. I did things that I never thought I would attempt in my lifetime: I would like every young Scot to get the same opportunity.

17:50

The Minister for Schools and Skills (Maureen Watt): I thank Elizabeth Smith for securing this important debate and I thank all the members who have taken part in it. This Government agrees that outdoor learning has an important role to play in the development of our children and young people. As a former teacher, I remember my time under canvas in the peak district. Like Jim Hume, I had the benefit of a rural, farming background.

As Elizabeth Smith knows, one of the outcomes in the concordat with local authorities is that our young people should be successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens. Achieving that outcome is important in its own right and it will make a major contribution to the other outcomes. We need every young person to have those qualities and to develop them to their full potential. As Robin Harper made plain, outdoor learning in its widest sense has a clear contribution to make to that national outcome in helping to engage young people at risk of negative outcomes and harnessing Scotland's natural resources to broaden their horizons.

As Elizabeth Smith said, there are examples of good work in Perth and Kinross. She mentioned Crieff high school and Roseanna Cunningham mentioned Perth high school, which has developed a successful programme of outdoor activities, on which it is to be congratulated.

As a parent, I too have seen at first hand the benefits of taking young people out of their normal environment for a residential experience. They come back walking that bit taller, having expanded their horizons, developed their confidence and formed more positive relationships with not only their fellow pupils but their teachers, which can only be a good thing when they get back into the classroom.

Outdoor learning in which pupils experience enjoyment, support and challenge, with clear links to the curriculum, is beneficial in helping young people to learn about the environment and promotes cross-curricular learning and physical activity. The vital element for pupils is to link the outdoor experience to their school work, so that they can take back the new skills they have discovered and apply them in their learning.

Outdoor learning is not just something that is done in five special days of schooling; it should be part of where and how children and young people

learn on a day-to-day basis. That view is supported by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education, which has emphasised the value of well-planned outdoor education experiences. It has noted that the best examples are a combination of school-based and residential programmes that progressively develop pupils' experience.

The Scottish Government is providing leadership and direction. Our curriculum for excellence guidance makes it clear that the outdoor learning environment offers motivating, exciting, different and relevant activities from pre-school years, to which Mary Mulligan and Robert Brown referred, through to college.

Local authorities and teachers are best placed to decide how to deliver the benefits of outdoor learning in ways that meet their local circumstances and which contribute to our national outcomes. For example, in my constituency of North East Scotland, Banff and Buchan College works with local schools to develop a range of children's skills in the local wooded environment, which is much like what happens in Mr Hume's constituency. Primary 7s use band-saws, which shows that Health and Safety Executive concerns can be addressed. Teachers and headteachers have to be more focused on transitions, of which vocational and outdoor education forms a part.

We know that there is wide variety in the duration and type of outdoor learning opportunities that are provided by schools and that a number of barriers can contribute to the problem. Those include timetabling, staff competence and confidence and differing views on the benefits of outdoor learning.

The curriculum for excellence sends a clear signal about the value of outdoor learning, but there is work to be done to develop teachers' skills and encourage them to use the outdoors as an extension of the classroom. The flipside of that is that outdoor education specialists must understand the demands of our new curriculum, including the development of the four capacities and the focus on skills, and ensure that they tailor experiences to meet those demands.

As many members have said, Scotland has a wealth of outdoor education providers. We need to explore ways of supporting them to form better partnerships at national, local authority, community planning and school community level, for the benefit of our children and young people. Margo MacDonald made interesting points about how community planning and community partnerships could do much more in that area. Already, the money that is being made available as a result of the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 is being used to provide opportunities for young

people who are in need of more choices and chances.

Margo MacDonald: It just needs someone at a local level to organise it.

Maureen Watt: I agree that it requires the leadership that we all talk about.

On Robert Brown's points, officials are currently developing proposals on how we might build on best practice and strengthen the opportunities for young people to participate in a range of outdoor education opportunities. I look forward to sharing those proposals with members in the coming months.

Meeting closed at 17:57.

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