

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Thursday 29 May 2008

Session 3

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Scottish Parliament

Thursday 29 May 2008

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

Drugs Strategy

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): Good morning. The first item of business today is a statement by Fergus Ewing on the drugs strategy. The minister will take questions at the end of his statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions.

09:15

The Minister for Community Safety (Fergus Ewing): I am delighted to present to Parliament the first national drugs strategy since 1999. Indeed, “The Road to Recovery: A New Approach to Tackling Scotland’s Drug Problem” is the first national drugs strategy since devolution.

There can be few more pressing issues for the second year of this Administration than tackling problem drug use. Scotland has, per head of population, more problem drug users than any other country in these islands, and more than most comparable European countries. We should not accept that as an inescapable fact of life.

Contrary to some perceptions, drug use is not glamorous. It severely damages health and in some cases kills—421 people in Scotland lost their lives to drugs in 2006; it undermines family life and relationships; it can lead people into crime and prostitution; and it can damage children and young people beyond repair.

The wider costs to society, which are estimated to amount to some £2.6 billion—£2,600 million—a year, are enormous and are mirrored by lost opportunities. Drug use is both a symptom and a cause of the health inequalities that afflict Scotland. If we want a more successful Scotland, in which all have opportunities to flourish, tackling problem drug use is not a task that we can avoid or ignore. As a society, together we need to face up to Scotland’s drug problem.

I have been greatly encouraged by the highly constructive spirit of the discussions that I have had over the past year with all the parties that are represented in Parliament, which reflects the cross-party support that was expressed in Parliament last September for the development of a fresh approach to tackling drug misuse based on consensus. I hope that, over the next week, we can show that we have achieved that, and thereby

send out from Parliament a powerful signal of common purpose.

The strategy’s foundations were laid some time ago. As the incoming Minister for Community Safety, I was pleased to learn last May of the imminent publication of a series of wide-ranging expert reports on different aspects of the drugs problem. That consolidation of the evidence base provided an excellent basis for a wide-ranging series of discussions. I would like to place on record my thanks to everyone who contributed to that work, particularly the members of the Scottish Advisory Committee on Drug Misuse, who provided invaluable advice. This is not in the script, but I would also like to thank most sincerely my officials for their advice, support and energy.

Our vision is that recovery must be central to our new strategy and that it must be the guiding purpose of all drug treatment services. Recovery is, above all, about movement and dynamism. It is the principle whereby services should not just reduce risk and harm but support people to move on towards a drug-free life as active and contributing members of society. Recovery involves a person-centred approach that recognises that drug users come in units of one, each of whom has different aspirations and needs, will require different assistance to help them recover and will aim for different milestones along the way. That is entirely consistent with the approach that was set out in the recently reviewed and updated “Drug misuse and dependence: UK guidelines on clinical management”, which are sometimes known as the orange guidelines, for obvious reasons.

Saying that more should be done to help people to move on is not a criticism of the dedication of practitioners in recent years to get more people into treatment. Governments should not second-guess clinicians or seek to disparage particular treatments, without which we would expose individuals and society to unwarranted risks. However, in the past there has not been enough focus on achieving positive outcomes for people who have drug problems, so we must make that a priority for the future. We will achieve such outcomes by reforming how drugs services are planned, commissioned and delivered. We are working with partners, including, of course, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, to ensure that services deliver recovery outcomes in the context of the new single outcome agreements and national health service accountability arrangements. We will establish a new national support capacity to help to support local partners to deliver the recovery approach in drug services and we will embed recovery in training and workforce development.

However, our strategy is not just about treating people who have established drug problems—it takes a broad approach to preventing problem drug use. We believe that the most effective way to prevent future problem drug use is to create a more successful society that has sustainable economic growth, stronger families and communities, and more opportunities for all to flourish.

We are also taking action, through an expert group and by reforming the education system as part of curriculum for excellence, to sharpen up the delivery of substance misuse education in our schools, but the strategy recognises that education extends beyond schools. Parents, in particular, have a key role to play in educating and supporting young people, but that can be difficult if they do not think they know enough about drugs. That is why I am pleased to announce that the Government will provide a copy of the know the score publication “drugs: what every parent should know” to every family in Scotland. As a society, we need a better and more informed dialogue on such issues, and I hope that the provision of that publication will be helpful in that regard.

At the other end of the spectrum, parental drug use can have a serious and damaging effect on children. An estimated 40,000 to 60,000 children are affected by parental drug use, so it is crucial that we tackle the complex problems that children who live in such households face. The strategy builds on the improvements that have already been made under the banners of “Hidden Harm” and “getting it right for every child” but signals a change of emphasis towards support for children and families. It places the child firmly at the centre of agency responses and embeds in practice the principle of early intervention. We are setting in motion a programme of action to improve the identification of children who are at risk, to build the capacity of services, to strengthen the management of immediate risk and to develop an evidence base. We want to build on the extensive good practice on the ground.

Tackling the supply of illegal drugs remains an essential part of our new strategy. We want to strengthen the powers that we already have to recover assets and cash from criminals who benefit from unlawful conduct, including drug dealing, in an effort to make a lifetime of crime open to a lifetime of recovery. We want to continue the practice of channelling those moneys back into communities, so that young people have the choices and chances that they need.

We remain committed to breaking the cycle of drug addiction and crime by providing opportunities for treatment at all stages of the criminal justice system. For every £1 that is spent on treatment, at least £9.50 is saved in health and

crime costs. Piloting the extension of drug treatment and testing orders—DTTOs—to lower-tariff offenders will contribute to those savings.

Our strategy sets out a new approach to achieving better quality and more consistent treatment across all prisons. In Her Majesty’s prison in Edinburgh, we are piloting a new model of integrated care that aims to give people the best chance of recovery from their drug problems. We will also maximise the continuity of care between prison and release into the community by developing and implementing an information-sharing protocol between the prison and throughcare service.

From the justice portfolio alone, we are making available £94 million over the next three years to tackle drug misuse. I am pleased to announce today that health boards will receive a 3.8 per cent increase in funding for drug treatment services. However, that is not the whole picture, because funds from other general budgets that are allocated by Government to local authorities are also spent on tackling drug use. The report that Audit Scotland is undertaking on the scale and effectiveness of expenditure on drugs, which was announced by the Auditor General last year, will be critical in developing a stronger base to inform future spending.

Our strategy sets out a vision where fewer people start using drugs; where early intervention prevents and reduces the harms caused by drugs; where more people recover to make a positive contribution to society; and where communities are stronger and safer places to live and work. I hope that the strategy will have the whole-hearted support of all members when it is debated in the chamber next Wednesday.

The Presiding Officer: We have around 30 minutes for questions, after which we will move on to the next item of business. It would be helpful, in managing that process, if members who wish to ask a question pressed their request-to-speak buttons now.

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab): I thank the minister for providing a copy of the statement in advance.

Paragraph 31 of the statement says that the strategy

“sets out a vision where fewer people start using drugs; where early intervention prevents and reduces the harms caused by drugs; where more people recover to make a positive contribution to society”.

It is difficult to disagree with that, and there may well be a consensus on it, but I am not convinced that it is exactly a new approach. The real test is what investment the Government will put into the strategy, and what responsibility it will take to achieve its goals.

The Government promised in its manifesto a 20 per cent increase in funding for drug treatment and rehabilitation, a national drugs commission and ring fencing for education on drugs misuse. Where are those promises in the strategy?

I have three specific questions to which I want answers. We require clarity on funding, so that we can see whether there is a real commitment. On the £94 million to which the minister referred, is that an increase in the justice budget over previous years or not? Does the 3.8 per cent for health boards represent new money? I also want to know how outcomes will be measured. I hope that there will be national responsibility for outcomes, and that the responsibility will not be solely that of COSLA and the NHS.

I am pleased that the statement recognises the importance of enforcement. Communities in Scotland want to see visible evidence that we are tackling drug dealers. The statement does not say anything about the shop a dealer campaign. Is the Government still committed to it? The enforcement part of the strategy is important.

Communities want to know that we are not just tackling the most notorious drug dealers, and that our legal framework ensures that every drug dealer—from the top to the bottom, the highest to the lowest—will be prosecuted and jailed, where we find them.

Fergus Ewing: First, the Government is working extremely closely in partnership with COSLA on tackling drugs. Later today, I will make a joint statement with Councillor McColl to an audience of those who are directly involved in tackling drugs. We work in partnership, jointly and severally, with local government, and that will continue. We are all in this together. It is a matter not of apportioning blame but of trying to achieve greater success for Scotland.

Secondly, it is clear that the Government has increased the funding that is available to tackle drugs and drug misuse. A total of £94 million has been made available for the next three years in the justice portfolio, which is a substantial increase of 14 per cent. In addition to the funding that the Government provides, local authorities are devoting substantial resources to tackling the problem. Further, the Scottish Crime and Drug Enforcement Agency, the prisons, social work and the third sector are devoting huge resources to tackling it.

One of the things that I have done as Minister for Community Safety is to ask Audit Scotland to examine the whole area and to answer two fundamental questions that I believe have not been conclusively or clearly answered over the years. First, how much money is being devoted by all arms of government to addressing the drugs

problem? Secondly, how effectively are the existing substantial resources being used and can we use them more effectively than we have done in the past? I am pleased to say that the Auditor General agreed to carry out a substantial piece of work on the issue. It is expected that his report will be available next spring. I welcome that, and I think that the Parliament will be able to learn a substantial amount from that corpus of work.

Annabel Goldie (West of Scotland) (Con): I, too, thank the minister for the advance copy of his statement. I also thank him for the constructive meetings in which he has engaged with my party in the past year.

Today should—indeed, must—be the start of a new chapter in Scotland and the beginning of a new fight in the battle against drugs abuse. I congratulate the Scottish Government on coming to terms with the failures of recent years, which have been characterised by an attempt merely to manage the problem rather than attack it head on. Too many addicts have been parked on methadone, and not enough has been done to move them to recovery.

The new national drugs strategy is years overdue, but it is very welcome. It marks a sea change in attitude and political will. When coupled with the essential—and it is essential—continuing audit of drugs services and spending, we will at last be able to chart the way forward to a new approach based on recovery and abstinence.

Scotland has found the political will to fight back. For too long we have left those who have surrendered their lives to drugs devastated and in despair. Let today be the day when we offered, from the Parliament, new hope and real help.

The Presiding Officer: We need a question, Miss Goldie.

Annabel Goldie: Turning to the statement, when the minister spoke of early intervention, he seemed to imply the prospect of more children being taken into care even earlier. Is that what he intends? In dealing with drug dealers, will the Scottish Government examine the Proceeds of Crime (Scotland) Act 1995 with a view to putting the onus of proof on criminals to prove that their assets were acquired legally, and not requiring the Crown to prove the propriety of that ownership? Will the minister consider extending DTTOs to all Scottish courts and to our children's hearings system?

Fergus Ewing: I very much welcome the constructive approach of Annabel Goldie and the Conservatives towards the strategy, and that of the Lib Dems and the Greens. I hope that there was a shred of support for the principle of the strategy from the Labour Party as well—I am an optimist.

It was a great pleasure when Annabel Goldie joined me on a visit to the fv-tox project in Alloa in October. It was a double act in which both of us were entirely sincere in the lines that we took. I think that we are both committed to making a success of the new strategy and the new recovery approach that it sets out. I believe that the recovery approach has widespread support from all those who are involved in tackling drugs.

Annabel Goldie mentioned DTTOs. We believe that they have had a record of success. The evidence shows that those who are subject to DTTOs and the disciplined approach that they entail have a high success rate in achieving recovery. That is why we are piloting the extension of DTTOs to lower-tariff offenders in Lothian and Borders. We chose Lothian and Borders because DTTOs have been remarkably successful there, so if the pilot can succeed there, it should be possible to make it succeed in other parts of Scotland. Conversely, if it does not succeed in Lothian and Borders, that would provide lessons. We very much support the proposals that I acknowledge have come from the Conservatives on the extension of DTTOs. We have sought not to bring partisan politics to our approach in that regard, and I intend to keep it that way.

Annabel Goldie mentioned the importance of continuing work on enforcement. I have worked closely with Gordon Meldrum of the SCDEA and I applaud the agency's many successes in bringing drug dealers to boot and recovering their cash and confiscating their drugs. I am sure that all members support the successful work that the agency and the police do throughout Scotland. We are absolutely behind those efforts.

Annabel Goldie asked about the legal issue of the recovery of assets from criminals. I said in my statement and we state clearly in our strategy that it is essential that the state is able to recover assets from convicted criminals who have engaged in a lifetime of organised crime, particularly drug dealing. After a person has been convicted of a drug dealing offence, and if they have no obvious visible income, they will be asked to explain where the Ferrari, the yacht, the many houses and the bank accounts came from. It is common sense that in such circumstances there is a strong case for shifting the onus of proof.

The plight of children is at the heart of the strategy, as I think every member acknowledges. The 40,000 to 60,000 children who have a parent who abuses substances—drugs or alcohol—are extremely vulnerable. I have been working closely with my colleague Adam Ingram to tackle the issue, and I recently met leading organisations in the third sector that do a terrific job to help Scotland's most vulnerable children. We look forward to continuing to work with Annabel Goldie

and her party and with all other members, to add to the excellent work that local authorities and the voluntary sector are doing.

Margaret Smith (Edinburgh West) (LD): I thank the minister for the advance copy of his statement and for the constructive manner in which he has engaged in discussions with me and my party's health spokesperson, Ross Finnie.

Drug abuse is a problem on a tragic scale, and not only is it a criminal justice matter, it fundamentally affects the health of our nation. We can ask only a few questions today, but we will pursue a number of issues in next week's debate and in the coming weeks, such as the need to tackle drug dealers and the need for proper investment in rehabilitation.

Given the need for early intervention to assist the families of drug users, how will services improve their ability to identify and target children who are not just at risk of immediate harm but are at greater risk of misusing drugs in the years to come?

The minister knows that we suggested a further roll-out of DTTOs, so we welcome the pilot for lower-tariff offenders. We are also keen for drugs courts to be extended beyond Glasgow and Fife. Has consideration been given to such a measure?

Will the minister confirm that in the range of options that are available to drug users, there is still a place for methadone prescription, when that is the right treatment for the individual? Are there plans to review how people on the methadone programme are dealt with and how their progress is monitored? How will the current approach change as a result of the strategy?

Fergus Ewing: I thank Margaret Smith and her colleagues for engaging during the past year in building around the strategy a consensus that is free from partisan party politics. I welcome her party's approach.

I visited the Glasgow drugs court and discussed its work with sheriffs. I pay tribute to the sheriffs and everyone who supports them. They are committed to taking a fundamentally different approach on the bench, in which they become involved in seeing through sentences. I think that the approach has worked, but we need to evaluate it thoroughly. If it is demonstrated that the approach should be extended, we will give most careful consideration to the matter. Another issue is to do with educating sheriffs and giving them the proper training that they need. What we need might be not drugs courts but sheriffs who are fully trained and versed in the complex issues around helping individuals to recover.

Margaret Smith mentioned support for families. I had great pleasure in speaking at the annual

general meeting of the Scottish Network for Families Affected by Drugs. I hope that we will continue to support SNFAD's excellent work at community level to support families. In many cases, the family provides the most direct support to people who are trying to tackle a drug addiction. That is why the publication "drugs: what every parent should know" is being sent to every family in Scotland. Although adults over a certain age might know quite a lot about the dangers of alcohol, they might know little about drugs. By providing the guide to every family, we will equip families and parents with the facts about drugs, educate them about the risks and empower them by setting out where help can be obtained. That is an excellent initiative.

I think that all members who have been involved in the debate about methadone would acknowledge that it has a key role to play in treatment. It was introduced in response to the serious threat of AIDS and other health problems. However, although we have been fairly good at getting people onto methadone treatment programmes, we have been less good at getting them off methadone and into full recovery.

I stress that recovery is not just an end point; it is a journey that is different for every person. That is why our approach is informed by the publication "Essential Care: a report on the approach required to maximise opportunity for recovery from problem substance use in Scotland", which was produced by Brian Kidd and his team. The report points out that individuals have different needs if they are to achieve recovery and that everyone is entitled to be treated individually.

The Presiding Officer: We come to questions from back benchers—I emphasise "questions", as I did in yesterday's meeting. We do not have time for speeches or lengthy preambles. A number of members want to ask questions, and I can take no time out of the next debate, which is already oversubscribed.

Brian Adam (Aberdeen North) (SNP): I welcome the statement. Does the minister acknowledge that, in the north-east, the lack of access to treatment has been a significant problem? Does he welcome the recent reduction in the number of people waiting for treatment from 780 to 640? Will he encourage the development in the north-east of a wider range of services to tackle the wide range of problems that he identified?

Fergus Ewing: Brian Adam and I attended a meeting in Aberdeen to discuss the serious problem that has existed in the area for a long time. I welcome his support and his advocacy of his constituents' interests and I acknowledge that there has been a particular problem in the area. That is why I visited the area and why more

resources have been made available to tackle the problem. We are closely monitoring continuing efforts in that regard. I hope and am confident that the new approach in our strategy will involve a focus on people's need for extra help to get off methadone and become drug free.

Paul Martin (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab): Of course members of all parties seek consensus, but we must also hold the Government to account. In its manifesto, the Scottish National Party made a commitment to

"a 20 per cent increase in funding for drug treatment and rehabilitation programmes."

In the current spirit of consensus, I ask the minister to say whether that manifesto commitment will be met.

Fergus Ewing: I have made it clear that the Government is allocating substantial additional resources—an increase of 14 per cent over the next three years. However, as I have already pointed out, that is not the whole picture. Local government and the third sector are also contributing resources to deal with the problem. If it were as simple as signing a cheque and all would be well, we would sign a cheque, but it is not that simple. That is why we have asked the Auditor General to investigate not only the totality of funding from all Government departments and agencies but the effectiveness of spending.

Is there a member in the chamber today who can put their hand on their heart and say that every £1 million that is spent on the problem is well spent? I cannot say that, which is why we have asked the Auditor General to examine the matter. It is not about throwing money at a problem. If there has ever been a more complex, ingrained problem as that of tackling the grip of drug addiction, I do not know what it is. Tackling it requires the continued devotion of many people, who help users with problems and do a job that few of us would like to do. In more than 50 visits around Scotland, I have seen at first hand the results of the work that people do on the ground. We want to praise that work and reinvigorate and energise those people, rather than argue about percentage points and cash and throw money at the problem.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): I warmly welcome Mr Ewing's statement, and I congratulate him on his energetic and enthusiastic contribution to tackling Scotland's drug problem.

What impact does he believe that booklets such as "drugs: what every parent should know" will have on future drug use? Does he believe that parents will be in a better position to address drugs issues within their families?

Fergus Ewing: The information that we are providing to parents will have a significant impact. Of course, it is always difficult to measure the precise impact of prevention efforts, education and information campaigns—it is not really possible to do so in a scientific sense—but I will give one example. The cost to society of one drug addict in Scotland with a problematic habit is £50,000 per year. Over 10 years, that person will cost Scotland £0.5 million. That costs more than the exercise of providing every family in Scotland with the “drugs: what every parent should know”, which provides information to parents that I believe they would not otherwise have. If that helps 10 or 100 parents to address earlier the problems that they see in their son or daughter, and to identify earlier the problems of a young teenager who is starting to get into the grip of addiction, the cost will be repaid many times over. That is why I am proud and delighted that we are taking this initiative.

Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I will save my detailed comments for the debate on the drugs strategy next week, but I have a couple of specific questions. Has the minister dropped the previous Administration’s target of getting an additional 10 per cent of people with drug problems into treatment? When will the delivery reform group that is working on an outcomes-based framework produce a report? There was no mention of alcohol and drug action teams in the minister’s statement. How does cutting the funding to data-sharing partnerships—from £150,000 per year to £50,000 per year in the Lothians—help to deliver on the information sharing that the minister believes is fundamental to the delivery of the part of his strategy that relates to children?

Fergus Ewing: I thank Richard Simpson for his input in relation to the drugs strategy. I know that he played a significant role in his ministerial career, not least in establishing the 218 service in Glasgow, which I have visited and which does an excellent job.

It is no secret that the key to the strategy is delivery and implementation. That is the next step, to which Shona Robison, Adam Ingram and I are devoted. We accept that the evidence base is poor, particularly in relation to the unacceptably high level of drug-related deaths in Scotland. One death is too many; 421 deaths is, frankly, a disgraceful figure. That is why we are establishing a database to record more accurately the circumstances and facts surrounding the deaths of those individuals. It is, I think, admitted that we do not have a sufficient information base.

On evidence gathering, I have been disappointed by the lack of up-to-date evidence. Even the evidence on the number of methadone users and problematic drug users is somewhat out

of date. We will therefore devote considerable time and effort to improving how we garner and record data.

On targets, we are working closely with COSLA and the third sector to develop single outcome agreements. The way in which the Government can assist by providing national support capacity will be key. That is the main task that SACDM will undertake over the next six months. I look forward to working closely with Richard Simpson in fulfilling that task, because it will be key to the strategy’s success.

In autumn last year, Shona Robison and I brought together the leaders of the ADATs from all over Scotland. It was the first time that they had met for some years. They recognise that there is a lack of clarity in the teams’ function and a lack of clear lines of accountability. It is early days yet, but SACDM is addressing that as its key priority over the coming months. That work is necessary in order to achieve the success for which we aim.

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): How will the drugs strategy be integrated across Government departments and local agencies, not only to ensure that people break their addiction, but to enable them to get back into education, training and employment and to help them with housing? Housing is an enormous problem for those who come through the system in Inverness.

Many people with a drug problem also have an underlying mental health problem. How will the minister ensure that people are treated for their mental health issues at the same time as they receive treatment for their drug addiction?

Fergus Ewing: Mary Scanlon is right: there is a close connection between those who have a mental health problem and those who have an addiction problem. The authorities are very often dealing with the same cohort of people. There are clear links between drug addiction and homelessness and a lack of housing. That has been a particular problem in Inverness, and I know that Mary Scanlon has pursued that issue energetically.

Mary Scanlon asked how Government directorates are working together. I have worked closely at all times with Shona Robison and Adam Ingram, and I have had several meetings during the development of the strategy with interested parties across the board. It is equally important that those who are involved at the local level work closely together. It is encouraging that we have seen excellent examples of that. For example, throughcare services in Edinburgh are leading the way by providing housing to those who have come out of prison and thereby offering them some chance that they will not relapse. There are many more examples of such provision throughout

Scotland, but if Mary Scanlon has specific examples of where more needs to be done, I will be happy to examine them.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): The minister is specific on funding in saying that health boards will receive a 3.8 per cent increase. Under the present funding settlement for local authorities, Highland Council has to achieve savings. Is the spend to which the minister refers in the final part of paragraph 29 in my copy of his statement within the local government settlement or in addition to it?

Fergus Ewing: The Government will release the funding that I mentioned to health boards over the next three years to fund drug treatment and rehabilitation services. As I said, the increase will be 14 per cent over three years, and 3.8 per cent this year. Health boards will receive £24.6 million in 2008-09 to provide services, which is a 3.8 per cent increase on the 2007-08 allocation of £23.7 million. In addition, money is going to the health boards to support alcohol and drug action teams.

Jamie Stone mentions local government, which is a topic that has been well canvassed in the chamber. Local authorities have received a fair settlement from the Government. Our removing the shackles of more than 60 ring-fenced funds will allow local authorities to tackle local priorities more effectively—without 60 little piggy banks to administer, to do bookkeeping for, to make journal entries for and to account for. Local authorities can now devote their efforts to tackling problems directly. Of course, they will have tough choices to make and, like this Government, they will not always be Mr Popular. However, we are working closely with local government, which is why Ronnie McColl and I will make a statement on these topics at a press conference later today.

The Presiding Officer: Time is getting tight. If I am to call everybody who has requested to speak, I must ask for strictly one question per member. Brevity is the key word, and I am afraid that that must apply to the answers as well.

Ian McKee (Lothians) (SNP): We surely all agree with the minister that helping people to come completely off drugs is the gold standard and a worthy aim of treatments. However, in my experience, the main problem for people is not coming off drugs but staying off drugs when continuing to live in the circumstances that caused the drug misuse in the first instance. Will the minister elaborate on how the problem can be tackled, bearing in mind that extra-favourable treatment of drug misusers might cause resentment among non-drug-users?

Fergus Ewing: We must emphasise that treatment for drug misuse can be effective. It is not all doom and gloom. I have seen many examples

of young people in particular who have succeeded in achieving abstinence. In my statement I mentioned the orange guidelines, which set out expert advice to clinicians who deal with drugs management in Scotland. The guidelines make it clear that a significant proportion of people who enter treatment—between a quarter and a third of them—achieve long-term, sustained abstinence.

However, we believe that a new approach is required—a new approach of recovery, of encouraging abstinence and of finding ways of helping people to get off methadone. Those people may have been on methadone for many years.

Drugs ruin lives. For people to recover their self-respect, their self-esteem and their confidence so that they can obtain a job or a house, they may need many different types of intervention. That is why we are absolutely committed to the task. If we can achieve success, I do not think that there will be resentment of the type that the member mentions.

Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab): I welcome the minister's statement and his objective of setting in motion a programme of action to improve the identification of children at risk and to build capacity in services. In his meeting later today with COSLA, will he discuss the funding of core children's services—where the gap between the grant-aided expenditure funding allocation and actual local government spending is massive, to the detriment of children? How will the action programme ensure that information will indeed be shared to the benefit of children at risk? That has so far been difficult to achieve. Will the—

The Presiding Officer: Briefly please, Mr McNeil.

Duncan McNeil: Will the action programme include legislation, if necessary, to ensure that information is shared?

Fergus Ewing: If it can be demonstrated that legislation is necessary, that route will always be considered. Much progress has been made, with agencies working together, in identifying children at risk. Duncan McNeil has raised the topic consistently in the Parliament for many years, as have many others.

Just last week, Adam Ingram and I met a number of charities involved in providing intervention assistance to the most vulnerable children in Scotland. We have adopted the approach of the getting it right for every child agenda. The needs of children are at the heart of the issue. General practitioners must share information about children if they believe that they are at risk. That is in the orange guidelines; the Hippocratic oath is overridden where the interests of children at risk are concerned.

However, I must sound a cautionary note. When Adam Ingram and I met the children's charities last week, some of them said that placing too much focus on identification can detract from the work that those charities have to do every day to provide help and support services for children who have already been identified as being at risk.

We need to consider information sharing in the round. This Government has taken the step of providing a line that people in communities can call if they believe that a child is at risk. We hope that, with that additional mechanism, we will be able to tackle the problems that Duncan McNeil correctly raises.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): I am afraid that we will have to move on to the next item of business. I apologise to those whom we were not able to call.

Common Agricultural Policy

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): The next item of business is a debate on motion S3M-2002, in the name of Richard Lochhead, on the common agricultural policy health check.

10:00

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment (Richard Lochhead): I am delighted to have the opportunity to open this debate on the European Commission's health check of the common agricultural policy.

Farming and crofting play a central role in our economy and we all enjoy the products of Scottish agriculture in our homes and in restaurants. We can all be justifiably proud of Scotland's strong reputation for quality food and a spectacular environment, and we must equip our agricultural sector for the challenges ahead.

As I am in a generous mood today, I begin by welcoming the Labour Party amendment, which refers to the sector's role in sustaining our rural communities. I may even have something positive to say about other parties' amendments as well.

The Commission's health check provides an important opportunity to take stock of how far we have come since the previous reforms. The health check is a pit stop that will allow us to check on wear and tear and to anticipate what is needed over the next few years if agriculture is to remain a dynamic industry that is competitive in markets and plays its full part in achieving sustainable economic growth for Scotland through food production and the environmental management of our land.

The decoupling of payments has had a major impact on the industry. On the positive side, it has given farmers greater freedom to choose what to produce. In the past 12 months, I have had the opportunity of seeing plenty examples of farmers using that flexibility to the full, switching resources into new and innovative types of production and searching out higher earnings in the market, in return for higher-quality products capable of capturing new and expanding markets. Examples range from ice cream manufacture through to niche marketing of locally produced beef and lamb. However, I am acutely aware of the challenges that decoupling has brought, particularly in the more fragile areas of Scotland where there is a high dependency on livestock farming.

Looking ahead, we need to try to anticipate the new pressures that Scotland will face. We can expect increasing pressure to be put on the CAP

budget from other policy areas in the years beyond 2014. The European Union budget review is starting to consider such issues. The eventual outcome of the World Trade Organization Doha development round may lead in general to reduced commodity prices, although that might be offset by an increase in global demand for food.

In addition, there is the challenge of climate change. Scottish agriculture must play its part in helping to achieve our ambitious target of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 80 per cent by 2050.

The health check is not a radical review of whether we need the CAP. A thorough review of the policy may be needed when the budget proposals for the EU after 2013 become much clearer. Nevertheless, the health check provides an opportunity for making sensible changes. We in the chamber will want to ensure that the changes are in Scotland's best interests.

Tavish Scott (Shetland) (LD): A sensible change to the CAP would involve support for the fragile areas that the minister has mentioned. Some in the industry have presented arguments on the suckler cow premium, on the need to retain cattle in upland areas and on the link that goes right through the chain to the lowland areas of Scotland. Is he impressed by those arguments, and will he take them up?

Richard Lochhead: I am certainly impressed by the argument that we must continue to offer appropriate support to our livestock sector. I hope that the health check will give us the opportunity to do that. The issue will be part of the consultation that we will issue in two or three weeks' time.

There is much in the European Commission proposals that we can welcome—for example, its desire for simplification. However, we are determined, as we move towards negotiations in the autumn, to listen to what people have to say about the proposals. As a Government, we need to be sure that the CAP that will operate in Scotland from 2010 to 2013 is fit for our purpose. The consultation that we plan to launch in June will help us to do that. We look forward to hearing from as many people as possible so that we are fully aware of the issues and can ensure that Scotland's voice is heard in Brussels.

Our objective is to ensure that the outcome of the negotiations later this year meets Scotland's needs. We must do all that we can to ensure that Brussels is fully aware of the special types of farming that exist in Scotland—Tavish Scott referred to one of those sectors—how much we value them and the support that we require in Scotland for the times ahead. At my invitation, Commissioner Fischer Boel will visit Scotland for two days in July, and I will ensure that her

programme highlights many of the issues that we are discussing today.

Scotland is different. Scotland has almost 20 per cent of the UK's cattle herd and more than 20 per cent of the UK's sheep flock. We produce almost half the UK's spring barley, for which our distillers and feed merchants are grateful. We also have more than our fair share of challenges, with 85 per cent of the Scottish agricultural area officially being classed as less favoured areas. That means that our land is less able, for reasons of geography, climate, soils or terrain, to produce a wide range of crops. That contrasts with the LFA figure of only about 15 per cent for the English agricultural area.

We are therefore committed to the continuation of the less favoured area support scheme, which helps some 13,000 livestock farmers and crofters to undertake types of farming that are considered to be good for the environment. We are currently operating an interim scheme for 2007, 2008 and 2009, but we will consult later this year about how the scheme should operate in 2010 and beyond so that the important environmental benefits are not lost.

We need to consider the European Commission's health check proposals carefully against the background of the special nature of Scottish agriculture. I will do all that I can to ensure that the United Kingdom Government recognises Scotland's case. Chancellor Alistair Darling's recent intervention, when he wrote to the EU presidency calling for an end to direct support for farmers, was not particularly welcomed in Scotland. The UK's vision for farming does not always chime with our vision, and I will do my best to make that clear. We do not have the rolling fields of East Anglia.

When the CAP was reformed a few years ago and payments were decoupled from production, the perfectly valid argument was that farmers should not produce for subsidy. Today, however, it is increasingly clear that in many parts of Scotland farmers require support to produce, especially if we want Scotland to remain a food-producing nation. The Government certainly believes that that is in our national interest, and I welcome the reference to that issue in the Liberal Democrat amendment.

The Liberal Democrat amendment also refers to a review of the Scottish rural development programme. We are keen to keep the SRDP under review. We will not launch a formal review, which could lead to chaos, but we will certainly keep the programme under review to ensure that it reflects Scotland's priorities.

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): While the minister is talking of reviews, will he say

whether it is his intention to review the historical basis for payments to Scottish farmers? His predecessor made that commitment, but south of the border a very different decision was reached. Is that part of the review?

Richard Lochhead: I will address that point later.

My experience at agriculture and fisheries council meetings in Europe tells me that many other member states are closer to Scotland's position. That should give our industry some comfort in the months ahead.

The Commission's proposals were published last week. It said that the proposals aim to ensure that single farm payments work effectively and that we have market support tools that offer a true safety net for genuine crises and catastrophes rather than quotas that can be an obstacle that prevents farmers from expanding production. The Commission also said that there will be a new emphasis under pillar 2 rural development schemes on four new challenges: fighting climate change; managing water; making good use of bioenergy; and protecting biodiversity.

When I recently met Commissioner Fischer Boel, she said that she was impressed by the SRDP and that it already addresses many of the issues. We appear to be ahead of the game in Scotland.

To meet some of the challenges, the Commission wants to increase funding for pillar 2 rural development payments across the European Union by increasing compulsory modulation. As we already have voluntary modulation, the Commission wants us to replace that with compulsory modulation. In addition, it proposes a progressive element to compulsory modulation so that the rate increases as the size of single farm payment rises. The intention is to reduce the large payments made to a comparatively small number of individual farmers. I agree with Conservative amendment because we have to think through very carefully those changes and their impact on Scotland. I believe that our approach should be outcome based.

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): Does the minister accept that progressive modulation, as proposed, would damage some of Scotland's most enterprising and entrepreneurial farmers?

Richard Lochhead: It could certainly lead to unintended consequences, such as large farms splitting into smaller farms to escape the regulation. That is why we must think through carefully the consequences for Scotland.

The Commission is also proposing increased flexibility in the use of the national envelope. That would make it possible to move a certain amount

of funding between sectors by top-slicing single farm payments, moving money from one sector to another and using it, for example, to target support at particular sectors or geographic areas or to help with the consequences of disease. We would welcome that flexibility in Scotland. We already have the Scottish beef calf scheme, which is funded by the beef sector, so we have used such flexibility in the past. The new flexibility would go a stage further.

There are several other important proposals under the health check, including changes to cross-compliance requirements, abolishing set-aside, clarifying the definition of farmer and so on.

The final element that I want to address was mentioned by Alex Johnstone. We draw members' attention to the proposal that would allow countries that have adopted the historical model for the single farm payment to move towards flat-rate payment entitlements from 2010. Even if we do not move forward on that accelerated timescale, we need to think hard about the future of historical payments.

When the next European budget has been agreed, we will be some 12 to 14 years beyond the reference period used as the basis for current single farm payments. Increasingly, we can expect questions to be asked about why the production levels of 2000 to 2002 should determine support payments both at present and in the future. However, if historical production levels are not to be used, what should be the basis for future payments? What should we be trying to achieve through single farm payments? Those questions will be addressed in the Scottish Government's consultation paper.

Farmers and crofters manage nearly three quarters of Scotland's land. They produce the food that we take for granted and have also helped to create a variety of environmentally important habitats. The quality of our landscape not only stirs emotions but represents a real asset for Scotland.

Our forthcoming consultation will provide an important means of helping us to ensure that Scotland's views are heard and that the outcome of the health check is appropriate for Scotland, our farmers and crofters, our environment and our national interest. I commend the motion to the Parliament.

I move,

That the Parliament, noting the European Commission's legislative proposals for the health check of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) reform, welcomes the Scottish Government's commitment to consult on these proposals, and on the longer-term implementation of CAP in Scotland, in order that agriculture remains a dynamic and competitive industry with farmers playing their full part in achieving the Scottish Government's purpose of sustainable economic

growth through food production and environmental management of our agricultural land.

10:12

Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab): The common agricultural policy is without doubt an important issue in Scotland, but let us not be under any illusion that it does not come at a cost. In 2005, the CAP cost UK consumers £3.5 billion, and in 2008 it takes up 42 per cent of the total EU budget. According to figures from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the CAP will cost EU consumers €43 billion in higher food prices in 2008. Those figures cover the combined impact of import tariffs, export subsidies, production quotas and other restrictions. That is why we must continue to reform and update the CAP, ensuring that it is fit for purpose so that it can boost farm competitiveness, protect the environment, improve value for money and address concerns about food prices.

Jim Hume (South of Scotland) (LD): Does the member acknowledge that the common agricultural policy is such a large policy because it is the only really common European policy?

Karen Gillon: That does not necessarily make it right. The points that I have made are still valid, and there is also the common fisheries policy, which Jim Hume may have forgotten about.

We must recognise that, in an ever-expanding EU and with food prices rising while many in the world are starving, the CAP as we know it is neither sustainable nor defensible.

John Scott: In the light of what you have just said, do you agree with Alistair Darling's statement that there should be an end to direct payments to EU farmers?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I remind members to make their remarks through the chair.

Karen Gillon: For the reasons that I have just outlined, I do not think that the CAP is sustainable in the long term, and we have to accept that. We must move to a situation in which we support farmers to be more profitable in their own right and in which producers are paid a fair price for the goods that they produce. There is not a farmer in the country who would not prefer that situation, and it is our duty to support them so that, in the medium to long term, they can achieve that objective.

In 2003, there was a radical reform of the CAP, which the Labour Government achieved—although it had eluded many of its predecessors. Who can forget the obscene situation in the 1980s when you were in charge of beef and butter mountains across the EU?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I was not in charge of anything then.

Karen Gillon: Indeed, Presiding Officer, but you are now of course.

We cannot and will not return to those days of Conservative rule.

The health check provides us with an opportunity to evaluate the reforms of 2003 and make any necessary changes to keep us moving in the right direction.

A number of recommendations have been outlined as a result of the health check. We welcome the minister's commitment to consult stakeholders on how those proposals can be taken forward.

The Labour amendment, which I am glad the Government will support, adds two important components to the Government's motion. First, it refers to the role that agriculture plays in ensuring the long-term viability of our rural communities by providing direct or indirect employment, purchasing local goods and services and sustaining local populations and, in turn, local schools. The impact is clear. Whatever shape the CAP takes as a result of the health check, it must have communities' sustainability at its heart.

Secondly, the Labour amendment refers to the importance of high standards of animal welfare. We have been on a long journey to get us to where we are in Scotland and we must not allow standards to slip. We must also ensure that the same standards are applied across our European Union partners and further afield.

Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind): Does the member think that we have to be in Europe, or signed up to the common agricultural policy, to maintain standards?

Karen Gillon: No. I do not think that we need to be in Europe to maintain standards. However, if the member is asking whether I think that we should remain a member of the European Union, I can tell her that I do. The two points are not mutually exclusive.

Alex Johnstone: Does the member agree that it is essential that we are part of the European Union, so that we can ensure that our farmers are not subjected to standards that are not shared across our common market?

Karen Gillon: Indeed. I am a strong advocate of a level playing field for our farmers, not just across the European Union but around the world. Many of the problems that our farmers encounter come from competitors outside the European Union. We should apply the same standards to products that are imported into this country as we apply to goods that are produced by our own farmers.

We are happy to support appropriate environmental management of the land. In government, Labour set the agenda through agri-environment schemes, and the Rural Affairs and Environment Committee has acknowledged the important role that natural flood management can play in flood prevention, particularly on a catchment basis.

The health check recommends the ending of set-aside. The environmental benefits of set-aside, particularly to many farmland bird species, are widely acknowledged. Initial research by the Government has shown that 75 per cent of all set-aside has already been lost as a result of the 0 per cent set-aside rate for 2007-08.

We acknowledge that rising grain prices and global food shortages have changed the debate in many ways, but the Government must ensure that alternative environmentally beneficial options can be found. Some benefits could be delivered through voluntary rural development mechanisms, but Scotland's rural development pot is comparatively small. In the past year, £11 million of public funding has been paid out through pillar 1 in set-aside entitlements. What proportion of that will be redirected to rural development in order to preserve those benefits? What meaningful measures will be found to ensure that we do not further compromise our chance of halting the loss of biodiversity by 2010? I am also keen to hear more from the minister on how he believes that cross-compliance can be simplified and improved in order to bring about greater environmental, animal welfare and food-quality standards across the EU.

We have considerable sympathy for the proposal in the health check to make the national envelope provisions more flexible and useful. In the light of the Shucksmith report on the future of crofting, that is one mechanism that ministers could use to help farmers in our crofting communities and other marginal areas continue to keep livestock. It is important that the consultation considers that option fully and recognises its potential benefits for Scotland.

In the medium to long term, we must be able to move farming away from a reliance on subsidy and into a sustainable and profitable natural state. A key part of that will be how we increase the use of local produce within the public and private sectors in Scotland. That is crucial, so we must find ways to enable it to happen. We would welcome an update from the minister on the progress that has been made on that to date and on what further measures he intends to take.

Similarly, producers must get a fair price for their goods. We need more than warm words from supermarket chains, which continue to make massive profits day and daily. Ministers must

continue to press them for greater transparency in their dealings with producers and for a commitment to pay a fair price for the goods that they buy. We welcome the fact that the Competition Commission outlined a proposal for an independent ombudsman to settle disputes between retailers and producers. That would be a step in the right direction, but such an ombudsman must have teeth.

We acknowledge the on-going debate about levels of modulation. Labour has argued consistently for moving to greater modulation, because we believe that the benefits that it brings in relation to developing a more sustainable rural Scotland are clear. We do not see voluntary modulation as an alternative to direct funding from the Scottish Government. Therefore, I am disappointed that the Government's "Efficiency Delivery Plans 2008-2011" identify voluntary modulation as an efficiency saving—something that means not spending money, rather than something that makes a positive investment in rural Scotland. We hope that the minister will clarify whether the Government sees voluntary modulation as an efficiency saving as outlined in that document. How can it be an efficiency saving, given that there is only the option of moving money between pillar 1 and pillar 2?

In taking forward the debate about future levels of modulation, we must focus on the context of the debate. For us, it is about incentivising the farming community, based on an agenda of achieving a secure future that encourages diversification, supports environmentally sustainable farming and ensures the long-term viability of our rural communities.

We agree with the minister that we must think through the consequences for Scotland and ensure that we maximise any potential benefits from changes to modulation. I am not yet convinced that the amendments from the Tories and Liberal Democrats are not too prescriptive in that regard. We will listen to the debate before we take a final decision.

I move amendment S3M-2002.3, to leave out from "with farmers" to end and insert:

"playing its full part in ensuring the long-term viability of our rural communities and enabling farmers to play their part in achieving the Scottish Government's purpose of sustainable economic growth through food production, high standards of animal welfare and the environmental management of our agricultural land."

10:21

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): I declare an interest as a farmer and refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests for further information. I apologise for not addressing my

colleague, Karen Gillon, properly before, Presiding Officer.

I welcome this early debate on the CAP health check and the Government's motion and intention to consult on the health check on CAP reform. Many proposals in that mid-term review are to be welcomed; I will come to that shortly. First, I turn to modulation and the unique and anomalous position in which we and Portugal find ourselves, as the only EU countries to have adopted voluntary modulation. That makes us the odd men out in Europe. We need to see the abolition of voluntary modulation by 2014.

Madame Fischer Boel rightly believes that there should be a level playing field throughout Europe and intends to increase compulsory modulation from its current level of 5 per cent to 13 per cent by 2012.

Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): If the member is so against voluntary modulation, why did he not support my motion at the Rural Affairs and Environment Committee, which would have meant that voluntary modulation could not be doubled? John Scott voted to double voluntary modulation.

John Scott: I will treat that remark with the contempt that it deserves.

As compulsory modulation increases, voluntary modulation must decrease. I welcome the minister's assurance on that. It is vital that we remember that, historically, every 5 per cent increase in modulation has reduced farm profitability by 20 per cent. Given that farm incomes are subject to enormous volatility because of rising costs and variable end prices, the importance of a steadying and constant single farm payment cannot be overstated.

That brings me to progressive modulation. That, too, is an area in which the minister will have to stand up for Scottish farmers, many of whom have larger farm sizes than the European norm. Many of our largest units have been built up by the most efficient and visionary farmers and food producers, who must not now be penalised for their entrepreneurial flair, given that they support many high-quality jobs in our rural areas. Progressive modulation would be a tax on efficiency. It would discriminate against our most efficient producers and encourage property splitting. At the very least, it would affect Scottish food producers disproportionately. We believe that it is a complete non-starter.

On a more positive note, we welcome the proposal to abolish set-aside, which will allow farmers to get back to doing what they do best: growing food for a daily more hungry world. Given that world grain reserves are now at 52 days supply—the lowest since the second world war—

we are only one bad harvest in one country away from a world shortage of grain. Further, if last year's oil price of around \$100 a barrel encouraged a massive shift towards growing biofuel crops instead of grain, we can be certain that the current price of \$125 to \$135 a barrel will reduce grain production across the world even further this year.

Before I leave the issue of set-aside, it is important to note that efforts must be made to hold on to the gains that were made in biodiversity during the set-aside years. That will require ingenuity from farmers, policy makers and Government alike. I support the view that the minister expressed in that regard this morning.

The abolition of milk quotas by 2015 will be widely welcomed by our remaining producers in Scotland, who have had an extraordinarily difficult time since the quota was first introduced in 1983. Indeed, that 25-year spell has seen many dairy farmers go out of milk production; that is a matter of the greatest regret in Ayrshire and south-west Scotland, which are uniquely suited to milk production.

Article 69—now renamed article 58—proposals are to be cautiously welcomed, in as much as they recognise that a problem exists for beef and sheep production in our most fragile areas. Tavish Scott mentioned that. However, we should perhaps look more closely at schemes such as the Irish suckler cow welfare scheme, which is supported from pillar 2 funding, to see whether that model could be applied to beef and sheep production in our less favoured areas, rather than the top slicing of pillar 1 funding.

I believe that we should not yet move towards an area-based payment for single farm payments, and that the historic basis for payments should not be phased out until around 2013 at the earliest, if even then.

We must consider all those proposals in the face of the gathering storm that food security and food price inflation represent. If primary food production is to continue and develop in Scotland, farmers and producers must get a fairer return from the marketplace than they have had in the past, as Karen Gillon said.

The health check must not do anything to jeopardise the fragile shoots of recovery that have recently been seen in Scottish agriculture—the high cost of fuel and fertiliser that is currently being borne by the industry notwithstanding.

I move amendment S3M-2002.1, to insert at end:

“but, in so doing, notes the importance of consulting on the potential impact of progressive modulation on Scottish farms and affirms that any increases in European Union-

wide modulation should be matched by a corresponding deduction in levels of voluntary modulation."

10:27

Jim Hume (South of Scotland) (LD): I am pleased to participate in this important debate and, like John Scott, I declare a farming interest.

The aim of the common agricultural policy was to provide farmers with a reasonable standard of living and consumers with quality food at fair prices, and to preserve rural heritage. The policy has since evolved to meet society's changing needs so that food safety, preservation of the environment, value for money and agriculture as a source of fuel crops have become key factors.

Reform of the CAP, under the guidance provided by the Liberal Democrat minister, Ross Finnie, gave farmers greater freedom to decide what crops and livestock to produce. Under the reformed CAP, instead of having to produce specific products to obtain support, farmers can choose what to produce and therefore have an obvious ability to match market demands. At last, it was acknowledged that farmers who are in receipt of CAP support have important responsibilities towards the protection of the environment, animal health and welfare and public health; we in Scotland have a proud track record on all those things.

The health check is broadly welcomed and we know that it is intended to deliver only an adjustment to the CAP if needed, rather than a sweeping reform.

There must be a level playing field for farmers in Scotland, so that we can ensure sustainable food production and a successful agriculture industry. Of course, those two elements must run alongside the environmental stewardship of our land, so that Scotland's renowned biodiversity is retained and nurtured, as my amendment states. We cannot have environmental benefits without economic activity on the ground to deliver them.

The health check includes proposals that aim to simplify the single farm payment scheme, phase out milk quotas fully by 2015 and find ways of protecting livestock production in disadvantaged areas. Those are all welcome moves. There are, however, concerns over the proposals for modulation, which brings me to the key aspect of the Liberal Democrat amendment. Any increases in compulsory modulation by the EU must be tempered with reductions in national voluntary modulation rates. Many farms are already disadvantaged by voluntary modulation, which is not widely practised in other member states; as John Scott said, Portugal is the only country apart from the UK that has voluntary modulation.

There is deep concern in the industry over proposals for progressive modulation. Quite frankly, if progressive modulation is implemented, it will result in land being split into smaller, less efficient units, job losses and the discouragement of expansion in the industry. We must remember that Scotland has larger farms than anywhere in Europe, and that much European farming is lifestyle based, rather than a serious food-producing business. Why, therefore, should we put our country at a disadvantage?

There will be no even-handedness in any system that employs progressive modulation or capping. Large farms with higher numbers of staff will find it impossible to absorb the costs of progressive modulation, and that will undoubtedly cause economic damage. There will be no incentive to expand and develop the business, which will be devastating for our rural economy. The wrong message will also be sent out to future entrants to the industry, at a time when we need to encourage as much young blood as possible. We want to make farming and agriculture an exciting and viable prospect for the next generation.

As I said, we need economic activity on the ground to maintain and secure our environmental benefits. If progressive modulation and capping are imposed, how will that good environmental work be continued if there are no economically viable farms to manage the land?

I am sure that members have all read the Scottish Rural Property and Business Association briefing. A direct quotation from one of the association's members states quite categorically that, if progressive modulation became a reality, he would have to either downsize, which would mean getting rid of livestock and labour, or split the holding. Both options would result in smaller, inefficient farming—just think of the runrig system of farming back in the 18th century and how inefficient that was. Perhaps Jamie McGrigor will discuss that.

The Liberal Democrats believe that the Scottish rural development programme should be reviewed in the light of concerns over food production and, therefore, food security. We live in an era of just-in-time delivery—unfortunately, gone are the grain mountains and wine lakes, and here are the times of world food shortages. However, as part of Europe, we can help with that. Food production has to be one of our key priorities.

In its 2007 manifesto, the Scottish Government said that it would give Scotland a stronger voice in Europe. It also said that it would work proactively to safeguard agricultural support for Scotland's farmers. I cannot emphasise enough that the Scottish Government must stand by its manifesto commitments to Scottish agriculture. I look to the cabinet secretary for clear assurances that he will

fight the cause for Scotland in Europe as strongly as the Liberal Democrats did for eight years; that he will say no to progressive modulation and capping, for the benefit of our environment, economy and agriculture; and that voluntary modulation will reduce if compulsory modulation increases.

I move amendment S3M-2002.2, to insert at end:

"considers that any increase in compulsory modulation must be offset by a corresponding reduction in voluntary modulation to ensure that Scottish producers are not put at a competitive disadvantage within the European Union; further considers that Scotland, with its high proportion of large farm units, must not be disadvantaged by proposals for progressive modulation or capping; believes that, in light of rapidly escalating food and fuel costs, the Scottish Rural Development Programme should be reviewed, with the production of food and food security considered as a key priority, and recognises the correlation between economic activity on the ground and delivery of environmental benefits for all."

10:32

Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):

Interesting comparisons can be made between the condition of agriculture in our least favoured areas and that in our large farms, between that in Scotland and that in England, and between that in Europe and that in the rest of the world. Thankfully, we have, in the EU, the ability to state the case for a European model of agriculture. Of course, there will be many diverse sorts of agriculture within that, but fundamental to it are ideas about the standards of food production. That is the kernel of the debate about whether the CAP health check will work.

As Jim Hume said, it is important that the minister has a strong voice in Europe. Of course, that voice can be strengthened by the route that the SNP wishes to take. However, at the moment, we have a lot in common with other countries that produce a lot of food, such as France. I am delighted that the French have the next presidency of the EU, because that will allow us to have a dialogue with people who have major producers and the sort of diversity of farms that we have. Indeed, Mr Barnier is already setting the pace in that regard. I am delighted that he is talking about making the CAP a

"lasting and more balanced policy in the breakdown of aid, as well as more responsible and safer".

He wants that approach to be continued in the next presidency. That is in stark contrast to the discussion that has been had by the UK.

The UK Government's attitude, which was expressed in a letter by Alistair Darling, is to support free global trade. That attacks the standards that we could have. The aim is not to have barriers for the sake of having barriers, but to

ensure the quality of the food that is produced in the European Union and in Scotland. Our beef and sheep producers all over Scotland have a high-quality product that is sold in an export market for the highest values. We are not trying to fill the supermarket shelves to the gunwales with quantity, but trying to produce quality. That product cannot be compared with the lower-quality dodgy material that is produced to lower standards that comes in from some other countries. Alistair Darling seems to want to keep open the door to that lower-quality product. We must avoid that.

Alex Johnstone: Does the member agree that Alistair Darling has also forgotten environmental standards for climate change gas emissions? We in this country strive to reduce the carbon footprint of our agriculture, but those in other countries have energy-intensive agriculture. We could simply export our carbon emissions and our food production with that.

Rob Gibson: I very much agree. Brazilian beef production involves cutting down rainforest and destroying the world's ecology, which shows why we must resist such mass imports.

Important facets of how we adjust have been mentioned. We should identify the elements in the Scottish rural development programme that need to be boosted. Some aspects that would help some of the least favoured areas need to be considered more carefully. Concerns have been expressed about how the forms are filled in, but we are moving into an age in which support from the Government and various bodies locally helps people to fill in forms. Rather, we must find a more specific means to examine the content.

Most people welcome decoupling, which has led to the potential for much more market-oriented farming. However, just as slipper skippers sell their quota for fishing, armchair farmers buy and sell single farm payments. I look to the minister to find ways to cut that abuse of the system, because that has come only with decoupling. To have a market in farm quotas is wrong.

We must provide start-up funds for new entrants in the crofting areas and many other areas. The policies of the Scottish Rural Property and Business Association—

Jim Hume *rose—*

Rob Gibson: I am sorry; I do not have time for the member's intervention, although I would love to take it.

Because large landowners will not let out farms, fewer farms are available for people. In the crofting areas, we are trying to solve the problem by having resident crofters, but we need money under the schemes to support new entrants. That is another reason why the suggestion of

examining the Irish model for suckler cow payments is important.

Above all, the health check, our friends in other countries and the commissioner's visit to Scotland this summer to see what we do will help us to face up to the food challenges.

Given that the costs of cereals have shot up and that much land has been taken out of being set aside, we must try not to disadvantage sheep and cattle producers, which support life in many communities that would be least able to support themselves otherwise. That is one issue that the health check can help us to consider.

10:38

Peter Peacock (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):

At times, the pace of change in the common agricultural policy is positively glacial, but we also have flurries of activity, as we have with the health check. The health check does not appear to be hugely controversial but, at the European level, the common agricultural policy is still controversial. As Karen Gillon said, the policy consumes about 40 per cent of the EU's budget and its successive interventions over the years have created a hugely distorted marketplace, as we all understand. The countries with the largest agricultural sectors gain the most from the policy. Export subsidies can affect and damage developing countries, about which we are all concerned.

As Karen Gillon said, the big long-term policy question is whether the CAP is sustainable when it has such costs, affects the third world and creates market distortions. The EU believes that the policy is unsustainable in the long term, which is why the common agricultural policy reform programme is in place. The reforms are designed to reduce direct payments to producers.

Whatever the big long-term policy questions are, there is no doubt that the common agricultural policy is here to stay in the short to medium term and in the foreseeable future. In that context, the health check is important to adjusting the programme to make it more fitting for immediate future years. As members have said, the CAP is hugely important to Scotland. It helps to keep people in the countryside, to develop the rural economy and to manage the countryside, with an emphasis on environmental questions. It is also the basis of our food production.

As I said, the health check appears to be largely uncontroversial, although clear differences are emerging between agricultural sectors. NFUS Scotland takes particular positions, not all of which the SRPBA shares. Crofters have different positions on some issues from the NFUS and the SRPBA. RSPB Scotland and other environmental organisations also have distinct policies in the

framework of the health check. That is why it is important for the minister to listen carefully to all the views before formulating his response to the UK Government and the EU to inform the outcomes of the discussion.

As members have said, the milk quota proposals have attracted little contention, so I will not dwell on them. There is also little contention about the changes to the set-aside arrangements, although, as John Scott noted, RSPB Scotland and other environmental organisations have highlighted concerns about the loss of habitat and the need for mitigating habitat measures in the Scottish rural development programme. In a briefing from the NFUS earlier this week, I was told that, notwithstanding the changes to the set-aside arrangements, perhaps only 50 per cent of previously set-aside land is coming back into production this year, so the situation is not all bad from an environmental point of view.

Consensus is broad about the national envelope and I welcome what the minister said about keeping that flexible and open to more options.

As Karen Gillon said, we set out our position on modulation when the SRDP was debated. As members have said, the Commission proposes progressive modulation. The case for that is unproven. The NFUS has pointed out well that a technical device simply to split farming units could be used to go under the levels. What would be the point of that? None at all—it would diminish efficiency and cost jobs. Much more debate is needed about progressive modulation, as the minister acknowledged.

The case for historic payments is less and less clear as time goes on. We must move away from that system and towards a system of flat-rate and area-based payments, which are supported by several sectors, including the environmental sector and crofters, if not by the potential losers. However, even the SRPBA has accepted the need for change in historic payments.

As members said two weeks ago, the Shucksmith report on crofting made many recommendations about agricultural payments. It said that moving from historic to area-based payments was important and argued for more modulation in rural development funding. It supported extensive use of the national envelope to address disadvantages for crofters and possibly to support the bull hire scheme. I hope that the rural development programme might also help with the costs of sheep tagging, which is causing great controversy and worry in the crofting communities.

Shucksmith supported new measures for new entrants. The report called for changes in the less favoured area support scheme and an increase in the minimum payment rate under that scheme. It

sought changes to the rural development programme, recommended linking payments more directly to public goods and measuring public goods and argued for a mountain area classification. The report also called for more use of the article 69 provisions, which John Scott mentioned and which have been important. Tavish Scott has talked about that.

The Shucksmith report highlighted the importance of retaining and extending the crofting counties agricultural grants scheme, to improve provision for new entrants and to support other enterprises that are land based but not agricultural. The report also pointed to the success of the LEADER programme and the importance of its principles, which could be pursued under the rural development programme, and to the success of initiative at the edge, which my Labour colleague Brian Wilson started. I know that SNP front benchers will be happy to support the continuation of any initiative that he successfully established—I see some heads moving but not nodding.

The Shucksmith report also highlighted housing grants for crofting, which remain important. In examining responses to the consultation, I hope that the minister will consider what the Shucksmith report recommends and what he can act on now to help crofters and to represent their interests in the health check changes.

10:45

Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I refer to my agricultural interests in the register of members' interests.

I welcome the opportunity to speak in today's debate, which I hope will inform and guide ministers in the run-up to the crucial agriculture council in November and the full EU Council in December. It is vital that Scotland gets the best possible deal from the health check proposals, as the conclusions will impact on farming and crofting for many years to come.

It was kind of Karen Gillon to remind us of the surpluses under the Conservatives. Do not worry, Karen, blue skies are round the corner.

My colleague John Scott referred to modulation or, as I prefer to call it, agricultural clawback tax. We all know that the EU agriculture Commissioner Fischer Boel, detests voluntary modulation because she sees it as a nationalisation of the CAP. Farmers and crofters, especially those who failed to access the agri-environmental schemes that voluntary modulation purports to underpin, might call it something much worse.

I do not know why only we and the Portuguese insist on this masochistic exercise for our farming

industry. Will the minister give us a categorical guarantee that any increase in compulsory modulation across Europe will be met by an accompanying equivalent reduction in voluntary modulation by the Scottish Government? That is the only fair and equitable way forward. Anything less will perpetuate or even increase the unlevel playing field with which our farmers and crofters have to deal. Ministers have said that they have the powers to reduce voluntary modulation as the compulsory element rises, but they must confirm that they will do that or, better still, get rid of it. The Scottish Conservatives' support for an increase in compulsory modulation is conditional on a reduction in voluntary modulation. We hope that the Government and other parties will therefore support our amendment.

On progressive modulation—the cap on single farm payments above a certain level—we share the concerns of farming and landowning representatives that Scotland will again be penalised compared with other EU countries because we tend to have larger farming units. Where is the fairness in hitting the most efficient farmers and food producers? What is to prevent large farming businesses from splitting themselves into smaller units to avoid progressive modulation?

Mike Rumbles: Will the member take an intervention?

Jamie McGrigor: Not on that point.

We look forward to a commitment from the cabinet secretary that the Scottish Government will do all that it can to oppose progressive modulation. I believe that the money that is being top sliced from modulation—or, as some farmers would say, stolen from them—should be used to reflect modern farming priorities. For example, most hill farmers would be lost without quad bikes, but there is no priority to support the purchase or maintenance of quad bikes. Quad bikes rely, for the most part, on petrol, so they cannot use the red diesel that is put in tractors.

I am convinced of the importance of hill roads that open up far-flung land for good agri-environmental schemes and I believe that they should also be on the list of priorities. I would like to see a return to grants for lime and slag, to encourage tired pasture and improve grazing in marginal areas. That would help hill farmers' productivity and bring extra added value.

Will the minister ensure that so-called flood management tries to prevent floods rather than allowing the water to go where it wants? It seems ridiculous to do that.

Karen Gillon rose—

Mike Rumbles: Will the member take any interventions at all?

Jamie McGrigor: Not at the minute.

Set-aside played its part and it has been beneficial to wildlife. If it is to go, we need to see a smooth transfer of set-aside entitlements to standard entitlements. I trust that ministers will arrange that. In the long term, it would benefit agricultural land to have a system of rotation of different crops rather than persistent monocultures, which we have seen previously.

I am aware that proposals within the CAP health check under article 58 to allow specific recoupling for direct headage payments will be controversial. The Scottish beef calf scheme under the beef national envelope has certainly fulfilled a useful role in supporting the beef sector. Most farmers and crofters want to see the retention of the beef national envelope. Ireland's suckler cow welfare scheme has had a massive uptake and I am prepared to say that the Scottish Government should think imaginatively about a new measure or measures to support the retention of cattle and sheep in our more marginal areas, including most of my region of the Highlands and Islands. At the same time, any new support measures should not risk market distortion, not least as the beef market, especially, has begun to recover in recent times.

Ministers must ensure that any new support measures under article 58 do not become a Scottish Highlands versus lowlands issue. The retention of quality sheep and cattle in the marginal and remote areas of the country is crucial, because those farmers supply the stock that is fattened and processed in the rest of the country. The maintenance of critical mass in sheep and cattle numbers is of massive importance. Perhaps ministers could use some of the ideas in the Aylward report into the EU sheep sector; it certainly has some positive ideas, which have been welcomed by industry representatives, including the Scottish Crofting Foundation.

On the subject of the Aylward report, which the European Parliament's agriculture committee adopted this week, like the Scottish Crofting Foundation I was pleased to see that it called for the abandonment of electronic sheep tagging, which some MEPs have correctly branded an

"ill thought out, illogical and unworkable scheme."

I could not have put it better myself.

10:51

John Farquhar Munro (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD): I am sure that if Jamie McGrigor's proposals were accepted there would be many happy farmers and crofters in Scotland. He mentioned the disparity between the north-west coast of Scotland and the rest of the country. I welcome his suggestion that more support

should be provided for roads into the Highland hills, as that would make my life much easier when I was out to get a beast for the pot.

One challenge that we face with large, centralised systems such as the CAP is making them flexible enough. Many suggestions have been made about how that should happen to ensure that the CAP can react to changing situations and fit the many different farming enterprises that can be found across the extended European Union. A problem has emerged because the CAP was framed some years ago to meet the demands of the day and things have changed dramatically over the years. That is why we need a health check.

World markets have changed dramatically in the past couple of years. The days of huge EU food surpluses are over and there is a need for the CAP to move back to its origins as a system devised to feed the people of Europe.

Our farmers and crofters must once again be encouraged to produce the food that we all need to eat. They need to farm sustainably, as members have said, but farmers and crofters must be encouraged to grow crops and to breed sheep and cattle. There has been a dramatic decline in rural Scotland in the sheep stock and in cattle numbers, which is having an adverse effect on the ecology of those areas.

That is why I particularly agree with the Lib Dem amendment that the rural—

The Minister for Environment (Michael Russell): That is unusual.

John Farquhar Munro: I do not always agree with Lib Dem amendments, but Jim Hume is such a nice man that I am convinced that I must support it today.

The rural development programme needs to be looked at once again so that farmers are encouraged to produce food rather than to farm subsidised weeds. Members may wonder why I make that comment. It refers to the set-aside proposals that were introduced some years ago, which mean that crofters and farmers can sit back, let the vegetation grow on the ground and not do anything about it, but they still get their regular single farm payment. They do not need to bother to have any stock, whether cattle or sheep. That seems all wrong. In my part of the world, stock numbers have plummeted since the single farm payment and decoupling were introduced and much croft land now lies empty as a result of the set-aside proposals. I will give one statistic for members who are wondering how much stock numbers have fallen. Last year on the Isle of Skye—that famous island that I have often mentioned in the Parliament—the wool crop fell by a third.

The document that was recently produced by the Ireland East MEP Liam Aylward—which is a promising report for the European Parliament's Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development—has been mentioned. It suggests that member states should have the right to introduce an environmental sheep maintenance scheme that recognises the positive role that sheep play in environmental protection. Like many others, I welcome Mr Aylward's report, but suggest that the idea could be expanded in order to encompass cattle production. I encourage the minister to have a good look at the report and at the possibility of introducing schemes to increase sheep and cattle numbers.

It is also vital that we maintain the beef national envelope. In that context, I welcome the NFU's recent change of position. Furthermore, I would like an envelope to be introduced to encourage the conservation and production of rare and indigenous breeds, such as Highland cattle, the Shetland breeds and the Aberdeen Angus and Belted Galloway breeds. Why not? From an historic and production point of view, it is important to maintain those breeds.

Less favoured area support scheme funding must be better targeted at genuinely less favoured areas. I invite the cabinet secretary to drive through the lush lands of, say, Aberdeenshire or Berwickshire with a crofter who works the shallow acid soils of the rocky west Highlands. I am sure that he would learn from the crofter's analysis of the relative challenges of farming very different lands. The relatively lush east coast pastures may be less favoured than the best arable land in the south, but the rocky land of much of the Highlands and Islands is far less favoured than much of the land that the less favoured area support scheme currently covers.

We are travelling in the right direction, but there is much to do. A health check has been proposed. By the time that the discussions and debates have been completed, we will have gone a long way towards supporting farmers and crofters throughout the country.

10:58

Dave Thompson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): It is true that employment in agriculture has fallen in recent years, but such employment is still extremely important to Scotland. It is particularly important to the Highlands and Islands, which provide an astounding 53 per cent of Scotland's total agricultural area. According to Highlands and Islands Enterprise, the agriculture industry provides the Highlands and Islands with just under 24,000 jobs and is worth around £280 million annually. Therefore, it is, as the motion states, essential that

“agriculture remains a dynamic and competitive industry with farmers”

and crofters

“playing their full part in achieving the Scottish Government's purpose of sustainable economic growth through food production and environmental management of our agricultural land.”

The livestock sector and our more remote communities are in particular need of on-going support. Therefore, we must ensure that maximum flexibility exists in the final CAP health check proposals to secure the long-term sustainability of such an important industry. I know that the cabinet secretary will speak up for Scotland so that our special needs are understood throughout Europe, and that everybody who is involved in agriculture in Scotland will fully engage in the Scottish Government's consultation on the CAP health check to ensure that their and our interests are fully looked after.

The NFUS has already broadly welcomed the CAP health check proposals and supported the simplification of the single payment scheme, the phasing out of milk quotas by 2015, the abolition of set-aside, the protection of livestock production in disadvantaged areas and increased levels of compulsory modulation. Of course, it would also like any increase in compulsory modulation—

Jamie McGrigor: Does the member agree that all modulation is compulsory for those who have to pay for it? It is not voluntary at all.

Dave Thompson: I suppose that that is true.

Compulsory modulation, which would help to create a level playing field throughout Europe, must be balanced by a reduction in voluntary modulation. I support the NFUS on that, because the playing field will not otherwise be level. I do not want our farmers and crofters to be disadvantaged in any way.

Mike Rumbles: Will the member explain why he supports the Scottish National Party Government's move to almost double voluntary modulation? It was the cabinet secretary's decision to do that.

Dave Thompson: I am surprised that Mr Rumbles asks that question, as the previous Government wanted to make the level of voluntary modulation even higher.

In considering the CAP health check proposals, we should take into account the recommendations of the Shucksmith crofting inquiry. I am sure that the Scottish Crofting Foundation will play a full part in the on-going consultation. Shucksmith specifically recommended that flexibilities in the CAP health check proposals should be used, and he specifically supported the revision of single farm payment rates to make the structure flatter, with a move towards an area basis for payments.

His report also favoured considering extended national envelope provisions to address disadvantages for small farmers and crofters in crofting areas, including the funding of a bull hire scheme and the introduction of mechanisms that would permit allocations of single farm payment entitlement to newcomers.

That there will be no shortage of input into the consultation is certain. Our job and that of the cabinet secretary is to ensure that all views are given a fair hearing and that a revised CAP that enhances Scottish agriculture and our precious environment comes out of the process.

Of course, the CAP is not just for the benefit of the environment and people in agriculture; it is also for the benefit of the wider public. We must link it into our national food policy. The first steps towards that policy were taken in January. They were designed to boost jobs and business, help make food healthier and minimise the environmental impact of food production. The policy aims to join up Government policies on every part of the food chain, from the farm gate to the plate. The operation of the CAP will have a major effect on it.

Scotland produces some of the finest food in the world. Food is about much more than what we eat: it is about jobs, the environment, tourism and the health of our nation. It is therefore vital that we get all our food policies right to secure a healthier, wealthier and greener Scotland.

Adjusting the CAP is by no means the only problem that rural businesses and communities face. One of the primary causes of pressure on agriculture and current price inflation is the ever-rising cost of fuel, especially in the Highlands and Islands. We heard much about that in last night's parliamentary debate. In the past ten years, standard road fuel duty has increased by around 33 per cent; in the same period, the level of duty on red diesel has increased by 275 per cent, which is shocking. The NFU has clearly illustrated the effect of that on farmers and crofters. On 20 May, it said that the cost of filling one farmer's combine had gone up from £267 last year to £560 this year and that the cost of filling a tractor has gone up from £89 to £186. That was around 10 days ago; the cost will be even higher today. In the light of that real increase in costs, the Chancellor of the Exchequer must reduce fuel taxation if he is to have any credibility at all. As we wrestle with the intricacies of the CAP health check, we must be keenly aware of all the other factors that affect the ability of our crofters and farmers to produce wholesome, environmentally friendly food at a price that allows them a living.

11:04

Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab):

No one could reasonably accuse the Parliament of not sufficiently debating rural issues—at least, not if we consider the number of debates that we have had on the subject. The minister from whom we are waiting to hear has been on his feet in the chamber so often that the Minister for Schools and Skills will soon deem that he has had two hours of physical education a week.

I welcome this debate on the common agricultural policy health check, as the common agricultural policy is an issue of crucial importance to Scotland's farming industry and our environmental sustainability.

Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): Yesterday we had a debate on climate change without any mention of agriculture; today we are having a debate on agriculture and, so far, there has been no mention of climate change.

Alex Johnstone: That is not true.

Robin Harper: Apart from a tiny mention. Does Richard Baker agree that, in ensuing conversations about the CAP, we need to start negotiating how it could be modulated and changed to support a reduction in the enormous amounts of greenhouse gases that are produced by agriculture to the levels that are produced by transport and housing?

Richard Baker: I certainly agree that there needs to be a rebalancing of the debate in that context. I am aware that the CAP health check is crucial to our environmental sustainability and, as a member for North East Scotland, I am keenly aware of how important farming is to our local economy and the many communities and rural businesses that rely on our having a successful farming sector.

No one would argue that the CAP has been a perfect instrument to support the sector or that reform is not necessary. We will, of course, debate the pace and detail of the reforms—the consultation process will be vital in that regard—and I look forward to the minister's reporting back to Parliament at the conclusion of that process.

Useful and informative views have already been expressed on the direction of the CAP health check, with particular debate about changes in EU-wide modulation, what the level of modulation in Scotland should be and how it should be achieved. Labour has argued for moving to greater modulation and I hope that the debate about future levels will take place in the context of farmers and rural businesses being incentivised to benefit from taking part in rural development and in projects to encourage environmental sustainability, because modulation can be an agenda for diversification as

well as for encouraging environmentally sustainable farming.

It is important to have a system that can respond to changing circumstances, which we in Scotland know about only too well. There is certainly merit in the proposals for flexibility around article 58, so that there is the potential, for example, to focus on particular areas or to assist in risk management. There will be at least some consensus on several of those issues. The general theme of the health check in developing the CAP in a way that takes into account public confidence is sensible.

It is important that the EU, the UK and the Scottish Government look beyond simply changes to the CAP and take wider and longer-term approaches to the future of the farming industry. I have spoken to farmers who wish that the sector was not so dependent on subsidy while acknowledging that that subsidy has been crucial in the past few years. However, we should be more ambitious in seeking to create a sustainable and profitable farming industry in Scotland. That means securing more business for local farmers through public procurement from the Scottish Government, local authorities and public sector agencies. It would be interesting to hear from ministers an update on their efforts in those areas.

There is the wider issue of food prices. Although there is understandable concern about rising food prices, there can be no doubt that, for too long, farmers in particular have not received fair prices for their produce—farmers have certainly not been getting a fair price from retailers. Whatever debate we have about reform of the CAP, it will not make a difference to sectors such as the Scottish pig industry, which is going through severe difficulties at the moment. I am aware from my visit to Grampian Country Pork in my region not only of how deep that problem is, but of the devastating effect a failing Scottish pig industry would have on rural communities and on animal welfare standards that far outstrip those in other parts of the world. I hope that the Scottish Government will do what it can to assist that key industry.

A number of us pressed in this chamber for the Competition Commission to take further steps to investigate the relationship between producers and supermarkets. It is significant that the commission proposed an ombudsman to settle disputes between retailers and producers. I am pleased that evidence will be taken in confidence, which is crucial. The new arrangements were long fought for and hard won. I imagine that they will take time to bed down, but I hope that the measures will create a more level playing field and that the key relationship between producers and supermarkets will benefit the sector.

Along with other issues that I and others have mentioned, those arrangements will be important

in securing a long-term, sustainable and profitable future for Scottish farming. Our discussion about the CAP health check cannot take place in isolation from those issues, but it is in itself of crucial importance. It is right that the Scottish Government and this Parliament work with all those who have a keen interest in such changes to ensure that they work for Scotland, Scottish farming and for successful, sustainable rural communities.

11:09

Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): The SNP's farming manifesto said that modulation would not be used to disadvantage Scotland's farmers. When the SNP Government came to power 12 months ago, almost the first thing that Richard Lochhead did was announce that he was almost doubling the so-called voluntary modulation for our farmers from 5 to 9 per cent by 2012.

During questions on the announcement last May, John Scott said on behalf of the Conservatives:

"Today's announcement, however, will bring about an increase of, effectively, 5 per cent in voluntary modulation, which will reduce net farm incomes by 20 per cent, bringing them down to just over £8,000. That is still too great an increase in voluntary modulation."—[*Official Report*, 31 May 2007; c 260.]

How right he was. On 19 September last year, the Government brought its amendments to the common agricultural policy single farm payment and support schemes regulations to the Rural Affairs and Environment Committee to introduce increases in so-called voluntary modulation. To introduce those cuts to farmers' incomes, the Government had to have a majority of votes on the committee to see it through. I immediately lodged a motion to oppose those financial attacks on our farmers.

I never expected SNP or, indeed, Labour MSPs to vote to oppose the Government—after all it was the SNP Government hitting the farmers and hoping that they would not complain and Labour that wants greater hits on our farmers through so-called voluntary modulation. At least they are open and consistent on that point.

John Scott: Mike Rumbles will recall from that debate in committee that when I asked the minister what the effect would be of not voting for the changes, he said:

"Annulment of the regulations would lead to a substantial delay in implementing the £1.6 billion rural development programme and everything that is associated with it. It would also lead to problems with single farm payments. Because the purpose of the regulations is to seek the Parliament's permission to take the voluntary modulation elements into account ..."—[*Official Report*, Rural

Development and Environment Committee, 19 September 2007; c 99.]

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): Mr Scott, this is just an intervention, not a speech.

John Scott: It would have been utterly damaging—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Scott, please sit down.

Mike Rumbles: John Scott betrays his naivety—he actually believes that. In fact, the payments were delayed anyway. As the minister made absolutely clear during that debate, the matter could be reviewed at any time.

Karen Gillon: Will the member take an intervention?

Mike Rumbles: I have just taken one. I did not expect that strong defender of the Scottish farmer, John Scott, to actually vote with the SNP Administration to increase modulation, a policy that he so readily condemned when the minister introduced it.

Richard Lochhead *rose—*

Karen Gillon *rose—*

Mike Rumbles: I know that the gentleman and lady do not like the facts, but they are the facts.

Richard Lochhead: Will the member take an intervention?

Mike Rumbles: No. I was astonished that, prior to the election, both the SNP and the Tories had pledged to support the rural community and protect farmers' incomes by opposing high rates of voluntary modulation. Hypocritically, they have both rejected the opportunity to achieve a fairer deal for Scottish farmers by voting through the Government's almost doubling of the rate of voluntary modulation, which reduces the average farm income to just over £8,000 a year.

Why did John Scott, on behalf of the Conservatives, fail to take action and use his vote to record his opposition to the situation?

John Scott: Will the member take an intervention?

Mike Rumbles: I have already taken an intervention. The Tories will say that they did not object—as I heard John Scott say today—because it could delay the payments to our farmers. What utter and transparent nonsense; how weak and feeble. I do not believe a word of it. The only other reason for failing to vote against the measures when they had the opportunity must either be John Scott's incompetence in standing up for Scottish farming or his deliberate decision to support the

SNP Government's proposals while at the same time arguing publicly against them.

Since the result of the vote in committee would have been six to two instead of seven to one, the Tory position must be incompetence, hypocrisy or simply a wish to toady up to the Government. It was certainly not an effort to stand up and be counted in support of our hard-pressed farming industry. Once again, John Scott has been found out and, indeed, found wanting.

It is for those reasons that I turn to the Tory amendment before us today, which reeks of hypocrisy. How can the Tories be trusted on what they say here in the chamber? In May last year, they said that what was proposed was too great an increase in voluntary modulation, but they voted it through in September. Today they say that increases in compulsory modulation must be matched by

“a corresponding deduction in ... voluntary modulation.”

What on earth will they vote for tomorrow?

The Liberal Democrats are absolutely clear that the difference between the Conservative Party and the Liberal Democrats in this Parliament is that we say what we mean and vote for it, whereas the Tories say one thing for public consumption and, at the first opportunity, support the SNP Government by voting through these measures.

Richard Lochhead accepted the call in our amendment for a review of the SRDP—or did he?

Richard Lochhead: It is always under review.

Mike Rumbles: The cabinet secretary said it again. Every minister says that the SRDP is always under review. Either Richard Lochhead is so naive that he believes his own civil servants or he thinks that we are so naive that we believe his claim.

Karen Gillon once again reinforced Labour's clear position that there should be more modulation. In my view, the party's stance is misguided, but at least it is consistent and honourable.

In conclusion, I ask the Minister for Environment to confirm in his summing up that, if Parliament votes to reduce voluntary modulation, the Government will implement that decision.

11:16

Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con): Given my life experiences, I probably find it easier to grapple with the complexities of a medical health check than those of a CAP health check. However, I am fortunate to have beside me advisers who are, to quote a phrase, expert in the field. We are, after all, discussing a series of

proposals that could have a significant impact on the future of Scottish agriculture.

We welcome the Government's stated intention to consult not only on the EU's CAP health check proposal but on the longer-term implementation of CAP in Scotland to ensure a sustainable and competitive agricultural industry that allows farmers to play a full part in growing our economy and contributing to food security through food production and which, at the same time, lets them manage the land that provides their living in a way that sustains and enhances the environment and biodiversity that are so important to Scotland's heritage and tourism industry.

Given the growing global concern over food security, it is quite likely—and, indeed, is the NFUS's belief—that in the longer term farmers will be required to produce food as a priority. Therefore, it will be important to sustain the industry's viability until that time.

We are all aware of the difficulties that farmers have faced in recent years in achieving a realistic farm gate price for commodities such as milk. The NFUS is rightly concerned with ensuring that any altered system of CAP support to farmers does not distort the market and give retailers a further excuse to reduce the price that they pay to them. Moreover, farmers must be given the incentive to develop their businesses and increase not only their viability but their profitability by reducing the costs of food production or by adding value before food goes to market.

The Scottish Conservatives have been at the forefront of the food security debate. We led a chamber debate on it only a few weeks ago and, months before that, John Scott said on record:

"current thinking suggests Europe will need in future not just to return to self sufficiency, but also to grow food for other parts of the world's population as well."

He added:

"with world grain stocks at their lowest since World War 2 and food price inflation increasing, farmers must be given incentives to increase food production to meet growing local and worldwide demand."

As a result, this mid-term review of the CAP comes at a particularly important time for Scotland's farmers, and we welcome a number of proposals in it.

I do not intend to go into much detail on those proposals, which have been well aired by speaker after speaker this morning. I should point out that the only aggressive input came—as usual—from Mr Rumbles on my left. However, as Jamie McGrigor and others have stressed, the key issue is that given the disproportionate reduction in profitability caused by modulation increases, any increase in EU-wide compulsory modulation must be matched by a corresponding reduction in

voluntary modulation. I realise that that view is not accepted by everyone; indeed, in its briefing, the RSPB makes it clear that it sees it as a threat to rural development funding. However, in our opinion, it is vital in ensuring a level playing field for all EU member states.

We also reject any plan to introduce progressive modulation of higher payments, as such a move would undoubtedly put Scotland, with its higher proportion of large farm units, at a competitive disadvantage within the EU and would threaten good jobs in the various rural communities that are supported by large and efficient farm businesses.

Although the proposals to abolish set-aside are welcome, we must not lose the gains in biodiversity that resulted from the policy. As Peter Peacock pointed out, careful thought will have to be put into efforts to retain them. We also welcome the move towards abolishing milk quotas by 2015, and any measures that might benefit beef and sheep production in the most fragile areas of Scotland will also have to be given careful consideration.

However, as John Scott has made clear, we are not yet willing to accept a move from the historic basis of farm support to an area-based single farm payment. We believe that any such approach should be taken only after careful consideration and that, if it should happen, there should be a very gradual phasing-out.

We welcome many aspects of the CAP health check proposals. We need a proper level playing field across the EU, with support for rural and environmental development to ensure a fair deal for our farmers, who, despite producing food of a quality that, as Rob Gibson pointed out, is internationally recognised, still have to shoulder huge burdens of regulation and European red tape. I hope that one outcome of the health check will be to stop the Government interference that inhibits farmers from doing what they want to do and indeed what they do best: producing food.

We, Europe and—increasingly—the world need a successful and thriving agricultural industry, and we must fight for it in Scotland. We look forward to the consultation and hope that one of the outcomes will be, as the motion states, to ensure

"that agriculture remains a dynamic and competitive industry with farmers playing their full part in achieving ... sustainable economic growth through food production and environmental management of our agricultural land."

I hope that our amendment will receive Parliament's support at decision time. We in turn will support the Labour amendment and—believe it or not—the Liberal Democrat amendment.

11:21

Sarah Boyack (Edinburgh Central) (Lab): We have had a good debate on the principles of CAP reform. There is no doubt that the policy needs reform; the problem is that there are many different prescriptions and that, these days, we face myriad challenges that are totally different from those that people faced after the second world war. For example, the recent extension of EU membership means that CAP as it stands is unaffordable.

In its call for support for a “dynamic”, “competitive” and “sustainable” farming industry in Scotland, the motion sets out most of the issues that we need to focus on. However, our amendment seeks to put the industry into a broader rural context, because we must ensure that our farming and rural communities have a joined-up approach. The rural development plan will be crucial to that process.

We also think that the Scottish Government’s food policy must play a far more proactive role in this agenda. We have very much welcomed the discussion that the Government has led on the issue, but food procurement will be central to the policy’s future success. As we all know, the East Ayrshire local food procurement project was a success and I will be grateful if the Minister for Environment, when he sums up, can give us a date for rolling out the programme. After all, allowing our schools, hospitals and local authorities to buy fresh local produce, represents a crucial practical way of supporting Scottish agriculture. It commands the chamber’s complete support and should be an essential component of a high-quality food strategy in Scotland that supports our farming industry. We also need to link farming activity to more localised processing and production; indeed, we have discussed the role of abattoirs in that respect.

We support the Scottish Government’s call for sustainability and its emphasis on the positive part that farmers increasingly play in their stewardship of our environment and landscape. Indeed, the chamber must recognise their significant role in that matter. On that point, I hope that Jamie McGrigor will take another look at sustainable flood management issues. They are actually part of the solution to the problems faced by our farming industry and to the challenge of flood management in Scotland.

Jamie McGrigor: Will the member give way?

Sarah Boyack: No.

Any CAP reform must include a range of environmental measures that are of practical use to farmers. They should also receive financial support for implementing them; after all, as all this

activity has public benefit, it requires public investment.

The NFUS has said that farmers find the process of meeting our environmental objectives cumbersome and prescriptive, and we believe that the CAP health check will provide opportunities to find ways of simplifying the process.

As Rob Gibson made clear, we must also address issues of quality. Consumers want quality from the farming industry, but at a price that they can afford. I am glad to see that consumers are beginning to reject BOGOF—buy one get one free—deals, particularly those on perishable goods. People do not have the time to prepare and eat all the foodstuffs that supermarkets are offering at those very cheap prices. The deals are not good both because they increase waste and because they affect farm income. They may be a loss leader for supermarkets, but they are a bad deal for farmers. We need to question them, and consumers are now asking the right questions.

We wanted our amendment also to highlight the fact that Scotland has in place more rigorous systems of animal welfare than exist elsewhere. Our farmers produce high-quality stock and good-quality food to higher welfare standards than those not only in the rest of Europe but in other parts of the world. Our amendment acknowledges that, and I am glad that the Scottish Government has agreed to accept it. We want to see animal welfare being delivered through the CAP health check. Scotland is delivering higher animal welfare standards and public money is being given to farmers for that. We want to ensure that, in taking on those higher standards, our farmers are not disadvantaged and that there is a level playing field across Europe.

There is not complete agreement that the single farm payment is completely out of date—the Tory view is different from that of the other parties in the chamber. Over time, the single farm payment will become increasingly out of date: it is an historical payment and it needs to be replaced by area-based payments.

Labour has concerns about both the Tory and the Liberal Democrat amendments, neither of which addresses fully the relationship between agricultural support and wider rural development support. I ask the minister for an answer to Karen Gillon’s question about voluntary modulation as an efficiency saving. We have read the Scottish Government’s efficiency programme and see a contradiction between what is said in the document and what ministers have said in the chamber.

Big issues in the debate need to be addressed. The rural development plan is crucial to the wider framework for supporting farmers and our rural

communities, including the public interest aspect. Some superb comments have been made about the need for public support for our rural areas. John Farquhar Munro, Peter Peacock and Dave Thompson focused on the varied and tough issues that face our farming and crofting communities. Those communities need proper support and we need to ensure that that is contained in the CAP health check.

Richard Lochhead was very snippy about the UK Government's vision. He made great play of the differences between Scotland and the rest of the UK. We want to be absolutely clear that the whole point of devolution is that the Scottish Parliament stands up for Scotland when its experience is different from that of the rest of the UK and feeds that into negotiations at European level. That is why John Farquhar Munro, Peter Peacock and Dave Thompson were absolutely right to highlight the challenges that our Highlands and Islands areas face.

Scotland's perspective is slightly different from that of the rest of the UK, but Labour absolutely defends the position of the UK Government, which has led the debate in saying that the former CAP system is not fit for purpose and needs to be reformed. Karen Gillon was absolutely right to point out that the CAP takes up 42 per cent of the total EU budget. With the new additions to the EU, such a figure is simply not sustainable. Reforming the CAP is a challenge, but it is also an opportunity.

Richard Lochhead mentioned climate change, albeit briefly. The issue is one on which the UK is leading the way. Surely we need to join up our thinking on that—it involves a challenge but also an opportunity. Some of the comments and positive ideas that emerged from yesterday's NFUS briefing on climate change were spot on and should form part of the CAP reform debate. We cannot separate out the debate on climate change from that on CAP reform. We need the tools in CAP reform to enable our farmers to do the right things to address climate change. Given that that is in the public interest, farmers should get support for doing that.

On the Labour benches, we believe that we have to think about the bigger picture, too. We support the need for a level playing field for our farmers, and the need to think more globally and broadly not only about climate change but about the trading relationships that we enter into as a country. The trading relationships that Europe has set up with the rest of the world are unfair to developing countries. Those countries do not have anything like the level of support that our industries have.

We need to develop a public interest strategy that works for our farmers in Scotland, supports

our industries and looks at the challenges. In doing so, we cannot ignore our wider global responsibilities. The Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund is absolutely right in its campaigning on the matter. We need to join up the issues of food support, farming support and our global responsibilities. Thinking globally needs to be part of the debate on the CAP health check.

In Europe and around the world, the big challenges are climate change, our environmental responsibilities, high-quality food production and our ability to source food locally. All of that must form part of a common debate. In debating the CAP health check, the responsibility of not only the Scottish Government but the UK Government is to represent us on those issues. We need to look forward to the next decade and not look back to the past. The question must be: where do we want to be in 10 years? Radical change will be involved and that means that it will be difficult. The overall message for our farming and rural communities should be a good one, but only if we seize the opportunities.

11:30

The Minister for Environment (Michael Russell): As I did last week in the debate on wildlife crime, I pay tribute to all members who took part in the debate—all members except one, that is. Unfortunately, I refer yet again to Mike Rumbles. The situation repeats itself. I feel as if, almost every Thursday, I enter an alternative universe—one in which I hear the world according to Mike; a world that bears no relationship to the world in which the rest of us live. It is the political version of Tourette syndrome: it starts and then goes on, and on, and on.

The serious point is that the Liberal Democrats had the opportunity today to make a positive contribution to an important debate but, in six minutes of winding-up speech, Mike Rumbles made not one new or positive statement—not a single one. I suggest that wiser heads than his in the Liberal Democrats—should they exist—consider the matter and ask whether what he says in such debates helps to achieve what the party wants to do for rural Scotland, or whether his endless playing to the gallery is destroying the reputation of not only the Liberal Democrats but the Parliament on the matter.

I turn to the positive contributions of every other member who spoke in the debate. Their speeches were done very well indeed, and I will list some of the real, not artificial, issues that were debated. Robin Harper's intervention on Richard Baker seemed almost like a speech. He was wrong to say that the Government is not considering the issue of climate change. Only two weeks ago, we published the important report by Henry Graham

and colleagues on the contribution of agriculture to climate change. We will take the issue forward at the Royal Highland Show, where we will hold the first of a series of seminars on how farmers and others can contribute to addressing the challenge of climate change.

I turn to the serious, as opposed to the artificial, points that were made about modulation. The Government was asked to give an absolute guarantee that

"any increase in compulsory modulation must be offset by a corresponding reduction in voluntary modulation".

I can give that absolute guarantee. That is what the Commission intends to do; we support it. The Commission has said that that is what should take place. Members should set their minds at rest on the matter. Jamie McGrigor is one such member—although his other points, including a request for quad-bike subsidy, were not quite so well agreed.

Of course, all suggestions need to be taken into account as we debate the CAP health check. Peter Peacock's opening remark that it is important that Scotland has the opportunity to debate the matter and that the Government should listen to all the views is exactly the right point to make. Many of the points that he raised in his speech are views that will have to be debated strongly. One such issue is set-aside and whether there is any conflict between John Scott's position and that of Peter Peacock. My view is that there is no conflict between growing crops and ensuring environmental benefit. However, we have to have the debate and find out how we should go forward.

The issues that Peter Peacock quite properly raised about LFASS are issues about which I, too, feel strongly. The Scottish Crofting Foundation, among others, has made strong representations to the Government on the matter. We must look at the LFASS and see how it fits into our overall policy. Indeed, Peter Peacock tempted me to speak warmly and approvingly of Brian Wilson. That is not something that I have ever done in my life, and I do not want to start now. That said, initiative at the edge was important. One of the big reasons for that was its concentration on asking communities to face the unpalatable. It asked them to look at the issues and ask: does this community have a future? It was an important debate for a number of communities, and it will remain so.

John Farquhar Munro sensibly raised some of the issues in the Aylward plan that the European Parliament debated this week. I make it absolutely clear that we have a commitment to work with the sheep sector to find the right practical solutions to issues including tagging. We will continue to do that. The Aylward plan contains interesting material on which we need to reflect.

A range of other issues were raised in the debate, such as the SRDP. It has a monitoring committee, which can consider adjustments and does so regularly, so we will not get involved in some massive, overbureaucratic review and restructuring, particularly because the SRDP as it went to Brussels was very much a creature of the stakeholders and the previous Government. We have consistently said that we will continue to review it, because we want it to be well tuned to Scotland's demands. The point that a number of members made about how that relates to some of the issues in the Shucksmith report is interesting, and we will have to reflect on it as we take the report forward.

Sarah Boyack raised a number of points in her closing speech; I will address one of them in particular. She asked about the next stage of the food policy. We will roll out the next stage of that policy at the Royal Highland Show. There are no easy answers to some of the procurement questions, but we want to make progress on them and I hope that she will engage with us in that process as we begin to set out where we are going to go.

This has been a key discussion. We must now send out a clear message about the importance that the Parliament and Government place on the future of agriculture in Scotland. Agriculture is valued because of the important contribution that it makes to our economic life, environmental life and social objectives. We must ensure that it contributes to the vision about which Richard Lochhead and I often talk when we go about the country: the vision of profitable and sustainable businesses in a populated landscape. That is what our ambition should be for rural Scotland.

We have heard interesting and challenging speeches, but this debate is the start of the process. We hope that when we issue the consultation document, we will receive responses from throughout Scotland and that those will reflect the views of the political parties and of the many others who have no politics but who want to ensure that we are capable of achieving the vision of profitable and sustainable businesses in a populated landscape.

Sarah Boyack was also right to point out that we need to learn lessons from previous experience to find out what we can do to improve our record. Single farm payments have been in operation for three years and it is right to examine how well they function and whether any changes can be made to the system to make things easier and more productive for farmers and land managers. We take the point on progressive modulation and will have to consider it.

We stress that everybody in the Parliament will make every effort to strip out unnecessary red

tape. Simplification, which is close to the First Minister's heart—as the speeches that he has made in the Parliament show—and to my heart, can be part of the CAP review, but we need to do it in the right context and we need to know where we want to go. Let us keep the vision of profitable and sustainable businesses in a populated landscape before us; if we do so, everything that we do in the health check will focus on that clear objective.

The Commission will need to hear the voice not only of the Scottish Government but of the Scottish people as they say what they want to take place in the country. Therefore, I encourage as many people as possible to take part in the consultation once we have issued the document. We must all let the Commission know what we want the future of Scotland's landscape, agricultural industries and greenness to be.

11:38

Meeting suspended.

11:40

On resuming—

Question Time

SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

General Questions

Crofting Inquiry Report (Consultation)

1. John Farquhar Munro (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive what plans it has to further consult with crofters over the findings of the Shucksmith report before it brings forward legislation. (S3O-3518)

The Minister for Environment (Michael Russell): The Scottish Government will publish its response to the Shucksmith report after the summer recess and will welcome debate on its conclusions. If legislation is to be brought forward, the Government will have a full public consultation on a draft bill before its introduction.

John Farquhar Munro: I am sure that the minister is aware that most of the Shucksmith report has been broadly welcomed throughout the crofting communities. There is no doubt about that, although several recommendations require more detailed scrutiny. When and how will that be brought about?

Michael Russell: The Shucksmith report is complex and its arguments and thinking are dense. It has been broadly welcomed, as John Farquhar Munro said. I will use a variety of mechanisms to help to devise the Government's response. If John Farquhar Munro has views on the matter, I would be happy to hear from him; I would be happy to hear from any member and people in the crofting communities or elsewhere. On the formal side, yesterday I had the first of several meetings with the full Crofters Commission to discuss its perspective. I will also meet other crofters' interests before I publish our response after the summer recess.

Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): One of the failings that is discussed in the Shucksmith report is the Crofters Commission's inability to regulate and develop crofting that is suited to local conditions and tenure balance. Does the minister agree that crofters being elected to local crofting boards could make a much better job in places as different as Skye, Lochalsh, Caithness and Shetland?

Michael Russell: The part of the Shucksmith report that reflects on the need for local democracy and local accountability is important. On land tenure, Rob Gibson is right to point out that, in Shetland for example, a great deal more

combinations of crofts will be worked and there will probably be more owner occupancy. The principle of local democracy and accountability is correct; the big issue is how we reflect it in any detailed legislation that we introduce.

Peter Peacock (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):

The minister will know that, as the detail of the Shucksmith report is fully appreciated throughout the crofting counties, questions are beginning to arise about the effect of some of its recommendations on the values of current assets. I am talking not about speculators but about ordinary crofters. Would there be merit in an economic appraisal of some of the recommendations? Would the minister welcome such an appraisal and might he consider funding or helping to support it through an appropriate agency as time elapses?

Michael Russell: That is a helpful and positive suggestion. I am positive about it and would like to find out how we could allow an economic assessment to take place. I will be happy to discuss it with Peter Peacock and I shall discuss it with officials.

Edinburgh Trams

2. David McLetchie (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con):

To ask the Scottish Executive what discussions it has had recently with the City of Edinburgh Council and TIE Ltd regarding the financing of the Edinburgh trams project. (S3O-3473)

The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): No recent discussions have taken place with the City of Edinburgh Council regarding the financing of the Edinburgh trams project other than normal discussions concerning the administration of the Scottish Government's £500 million contribution to the project.

David McLetchie: Is the minister aware that the revised estimated cost of phases 1a and 1b of the trams project is now £599 million? The Scottish Government has committed £500 million and the City of Edinburgh Council has committed £45 million, so there is a £54 million shortfall that has still to be funded. Will the minister advise us whether the Scottish National Party run council in Edinburgh is fully committed to meeting that shortfall from its resources and to building both those phases, and whether there have been discussions with the Government or any public agency on how it might be funded?

Stewart Stevenson: As David McLetchie will be aware, we committed to provide £500 million—capped at £500 million; no more than £500 million—for phase 1a. As an incentive to effective financial management, we agreed that, should our

contribution to phase 1a need to be less than £500 million the change may be used for phase 1b.

There are a number of conditions to our continued support: that the City of Edinburgh Council accepts full responsibility for the project and any overruns; that the project continues to be affordable; that the cost benefit ratio continues to be above 1; and that there is no on-going subsidy from Government. None of those has changed since our original commitment.

Margaret Smith (Edinburgh West) (LD): There is obviously potential for the business community to play a part in assisting financially. Will the minister agree to work with the council and TIE to get funding in place from that direction, not only for phase 1a but for further tram developments in the capital?

Stewart Stevenson: I believe that the business community is very willing to engage, particularly in relation to phase 1b. It will of course be a matter for the City of Edinburgh Council, whose project it is, rather than for the Government. However, if it is felt that we can make a useful contribution to facilitating funding from the business community, we stand ready to assist.

Financial Services Sector (Support)

3. Jamie Hepburn (Central Scotland) (SNP):

To ask the Scottish Government what advice and support it is providing to the financial services sector in Scotland, in light of global economic circumstances. (S3O-3498)

The Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism (Jim Mather): We are fortunate in Scotland to have the Financial Services Advisory Board—FiSAB—the pioneering collaboration between the Scottish Government and the wider public sector, the trade unions, Universities Scotland and the financial services industry, as they work in partnership to ensure the continued success of this hugely important industry.

The global financial services week, which is supported by FiSAB, will cement Scotland's position as a leading centre of international financial services. Events being held throughout Scotland are showcasing Scotland's strengths and are giving firms international opportunities for investment. Such events help to attract talent to work in the financial services industry.

Scottish Enterprise and Scottish Development International continue to provide advice and support to individual companies in the financial services sector.

Jamie Hepburn: I thank the minister for that comprehensive answer. The minister is aware of the setback that the financial services sector in Cumbernauld suffered, with Barclaycard's

announcement about the future of the Goldfish contact centre in the town. Can the minister offer any update as to the reports that potential buyers for the site have been in discussion with Scottish Enterprise? Can the minister assure us that any Government moneys that are put towards securing a new operator for the site will, as far as possible, come with a long-term commitment to the Cumbernauld area?

Jim Mather: I agree with Jamie Hepburn that the announcement was a significant blow to staff and to Cumbernauld, and I fully appreciate the impact that it will have on employees, their families and the wider community of Cumbernauld. SDI officials and I have remained in the closest possible contact with Barclaycard since the announcement of the consultation on the Cumbernauld centre. I last spoke with representatives of the company on 14 May, and I have been in regular contact with the SDI team ever since. Its next meeting with the company is on 2 June. On 16 June, I will attend a meeting with stakeholders including Barclaycard management, the works council, the partnership action for continuing employment—PACE—team and the local authority to decide how to take matters forward.

Barclaycard is still consulting on its plans for the Cumbernauld facility and is not actively promoting the Cumbernauld site. Therefore, SDI is not in discussion with any potential buyer for the site. Jamie Hepburn can be assured that the Government will continue to work with staff and other stakeholders, including him and other MSPs, to achieve the best possible long-term outcome for the talented people who work at the centre, for the first-class facility and for Cumbernauld.

Outdoor Education

4. Iain Smith (North East Fife) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive what progress has been made towards providing a guarantee of five days' outdoor education for every school pupil. (S3O-3524)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Fiona Hyslop): The draft experiences and outcomes for curriculum for excellence, which have been released over the course of this school year, provide rich opportunities for schools to use outdoor education and outdoor learning to achieve the outcomes that are sought. Our new framework for learning and teaching, "Building the Curriculum 3: A framework for learning and teaching", which I will launch on 10 June, will also provide an opportunity for outdoor education and learning to flourish.

The Minister for Community Safety and the Minister for Schools and Skills led a summit with stakeholders on 5 March. Building on that, we are

setting up a strategic advisory group to explore creative ways of delivering outdoor education, of sharing good examples across the country and of encouraging schools to provide more outdoor education opportunities.

Iain Smith: The minister has once again failed to address how that will be funded. In an answer to my colleague Jeremy Purvis, Maureen Watt suggested that funding would come out of the omnipotent concordat and its magic purse, through which all will be provided by local councils. That is yet another example of the fact that the only physical activity that the Government encourages is passing the buck. That is not good enough. The SNP manifesto was very clear on the guarantee and very specific on outdoor education.

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): We need to have a question, Mr Smith.

Iain Smith: I am coming to it. The manifesto said:

"we will provide an additional £250,000 each year to support the expansion of 5 days subsidised outdoor education targeted at children from our most deprived communities."

The Presiding Officer: Question please, Mr Smith.

Iain Smith: Will the minister tell us exactly where that £250,000 has been allocated this year? How many additional children does she expect to benefit from five days' subsidised outdoor education as a result?

Fiona Hyslop: As I said, we expect more children to experience more outdoor education opportunities. At the summit of stakeholders and interest groups on 5 March, they were clear that they expected that to be delivered through curriculum for excellence, which is indeed part of the historic concordat that we have with local government. The local government settlement, which is part of the historic concordat, will fund not just that education provision but many other education policies from the SNP. I am more than happy to make the same offer to Iain Smith—if he wishes to pursue his interest in the issue—as the Minister for Schools and Skills made to the Conservatives, who have proposed a constructive policy in this area.

Elizabeth Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Will the cabinet secretary consider our proposal of £10 million of funding, which would come jointly from public funds and from philanthropic and business interests?

Fiona Hyslop: I am aware of the member's proposals, and I understand that the Minister for Schools and Skills is meeting Elizabeth Smith in June to discuss them. That perhaps provides the opportunity to take the matter forward.

Ian McKee (Lothians) (SNP): In how many schools that were built between 1999 and 2007 are opportunities to use outdoor areas after school limited by the expense of the facilities?

Fiona Hyslop: Regrettably, public-private partnership provision has brought a reduction in school playing fields. We are determined to resolve that under our proposals to ensure that young people have outdoor learning experiences at their own schools. I am delighted to say that, with the launch of "Building the Curriculum 3", we are confident that more schools will take the opportunity to have outdoor education, outdoor classrooms and outdoor learning. Outdoor education is not just about residential provision; it also takes place in schools. The excess private profit that led to some of the concerns that Ian McKee has expressed will be addressed by the SNP Government.

Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Meetings)

5. Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive when the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning last met Glasgow City Council and what issues were discussed. (S3O-3549)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Fiona Hyslop): I last met representatives of Glasgow City Council on Thursday 6 May 2008, when a number of education and skills matters were discussed.

Johann Lamont: When the minister met those Glasgow City Council representatives, did she discuss with them the huge overrepresentation of young people with disabilities among people who are not in employment, education or training? That was highlighted in the aiming high for disabled children programme, which brought £34 million to the Scottish Executive's coffers, as the minister will recall.

Can she outline what action she is taking specifically to support that group of people through her skills strategy? How can that action be secured in Glasgow, given the cut in the city council's education budget of more than £8 million this year?

Fiona Hyslop: Glasgow City Council is responsible for providing education in its authority area. Our national skills strategy, the first-ever skills strategy for Scotland, addresses the needs of young people who require more opportunity to develop their skills. The situation of young people with disabilities is, as Johann Lamont said, clearly a matter for serious representation under that strategy. I am planning to meet the leader of Glasgow City Council in the next few weeks, and I will certainly discuss her concerns with him.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): The cabinet secretary will be aware that nearly 10,000 children and young people in Glasgow have English as an additional language, which I think is more than 12 per cent of the total pupil population. Is the cabinet secretary aware of the proposal to redeploy resources to support those young people? Is the cabinet secretary aware of the implications of legislation that was passed by the Parliament in the previous session for the requirement for those resources? Will the cabinet secretary discuss with Glasgow City Council the impact of that redeployment on schools such as Drumchapel high school, Hillhead high school, Shawlands academy and St Roch's secondary school?

Fiona Hyslop: I am fully aware of those concerns, which I discussed with Gordon Matheson on 6 May. The provisions in the act to which Patrick Harvie referred—the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004—make specific mention of children and young people who have additional learning support needs in respect of English language provision. I am concerned about that issue, which I have raised with Glasgow City Council. It is vital that we provide such support—the increase in the number of pupils who require such provision is a matter of concern. We must ensure that the necessary resources are put in place to meet that requirement. I have discussed the issue with Gordon Matheson and I hope to discuss it again when I meet Glasgow City Council in June.

Coeval Building

6. Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what steps it is taking with regard to the listing of the Coeval building in Prestonpans. (S3O-3544)

The Minister for Europe, External Affairs and Culture (Linda Fabiani): Under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Act 1997, Scottish ministers have a statutory duty to consider for protection buildings of special architectural and historical interest. That duty is, of course, carried out by Historic Scotland on Scottish ministers' behalf.

Historic Scotland policy is that listing will not normally be advanced when a live application exists for a proposal that would affect the character of the property. An application has been lodged with East Lothian Council for demolition of the Coeval building and development of the site. In that context, listing is not currently a matter for Historic Scotland's consideration.

However, as Historic Scotland was in the process of assessing the merits of listing the building before the application was submitted, it completed the process. After careful consideration, it reached the view that the Coeval

building in Prestonpans does not have the necessary special architectural or historical interest to satisfy the criteria for listing.

Iain Gray: Prestonpans has a proud industrial history, which involves mines, potteries, soap works and—of course—the salt pans, but little remains of that history's physical manifestations. Fowler's brewery's old headquarters is the sole remaining historical industrial building in the town. It is a strange kind of inverse parochialism that says that because the building is only of local historical interest, it is not worthy of being listed.

The local community and, in particular, the local arts festival have many ideas for saving the building and thereby enhancing the town. I hope that the minister will reject the advice that she has received against the listing of the building and will instead listen to Panners who wish to see this bit of their past preserved.

Linda Fabiani: The building in question was first considered for listing in 1996, during the review of the list for the burgh, when it was not found to satisfy the criteria for inclusion on the statutory lists. The listing of the building was considered again, following a further request in October 2006. The same conclusion was reached. The most recent review concluded in May 2008, when Historic Scotland once again found that the case for listing was insufficient, even were the council not considering a planning application for the site.

Fuel Costs (South of Scotland)

7. Jim Hume (South of Scotland) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive what assistance it will make available for drivers in the south of Scotland facing rising fuel costs. (S3O-3515)

The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): We are pressing the United Kingdom Government to introduce a fuel duty regulator in order to achieve a sustainable long-term solution to fuel costs for businesses and communities.

Within our devolved powers, a network of trainers to deliver safe and fuel-efficient driving to heavy goods vehicle drivers has been established, which is now delivering training commercially. Assessment from the earlier demonstration stage showed that such training would produce average savings on fuel costs of 10 per cent, which is equivalent to an annual saving of £2,170 per driver.

In addition, we are committed to establishing a network of trainers to deliver SAFED training for van drivers. For car drivers, the Energy Saving Trust continues to promote eco-driving and is developing a marketing strategy to encourage uptake. Information on eco-driving and vehicle

efficiency will also be available through the regional energy saving Scotland advice networks.

Jim Hume: I thank the minister for his long answer. People in rural areas such as the south of Scotland need real action now. The Highlands and Islands, which last night's members' business debate focused on, is not the only part of the country that is affected. Vast areas of the south of Scotland are in difficulty. Have the minister's deliberations with the UK Government involved consideration of schemes such as the rural discount scheme in France, which the UK Government agreed to?

Stewart Stevenson: My colleagues in the Westminster Parliament have tabled an amendment to the UK Finance Bill, which seeks the establishment of a fuel duty regulator. I hope that it will have the whole-hearted and committed support of all members of that House who pretend to—or who perhaps do—represent Scottish interests.

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-817)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): Later today, I will have meetings to take forward the Government's programme for Scotland.

Ms Alexander: Yesterday, the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning failed five times on radio to provide a cost for reducing class sizes to 18 in primary 1 to 3. Perhaps the First Minister can tell us. How much will it cost and when will it happen?

The First Minister: Very fortunately, this Government has put substantial resources into local authorities and education above and beyond what the previous Administration planned. As Wendy Alexander well knows, page 5, paragraph 1 of the historic concordat with local government in Scotland makes it clear that

"Local government will be expected to show year on year progress toward delivery of the class size reduction policy."

That point, of course, was confirmed only yesterday by the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities in evidence to a parliamentary committee.

Ms Alexander: I am still looking for clarity on the timetable and the cost. In September, the First Minister was asked in the chamber to confirm that his class size pledge would be delivered in the lifetime of this parliamentary session. He replied, "Yes, I can"—no ifs, buts or qualifications: delivery by 2011. The price tag, according to the Scottish National Party manifesto, was to be £210 million. Yesterday, Scotland's education directors said that the cost would be £420 million—double the original SNP estimate. Are Scotland's education directors wrong?

The First Minister: Scotland's education directors, like the rest of local government in Scotland, are now working for the first time in full co-operation with central Government through the concordat. Wendy Alexander should acknowledge that last year, even before the comprehensive spending review increased local government's share of spending over its course for the first time in a generation, extra resources were put into both capital building and teacher numbers in Scotland. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): Order. There is too much noise.

The First Minister: I hope that Wendy Alexander will now concede that the concordat's intention to deliver this commitment is the way forward for class sizes in Scotland. Perhaps, even now, she will have the humility to accept that the Labour-Liberal Administration failed to deliver on every class size reduction target that it set in eight years.

Ms Alexander: Last year, the First Minister was willing to provide both the timetable and the price tag for the class size promise. It is the First Minister's promise and the First Minister's responsibility. He really cannot hide behind the concordat, not least when COSLA, the SNP education convener of COSLA, Scotland's education directors and headteachers across the country all say that the money is not there. So let me try again: how much will it cost?

The First Minister: Wendy Alexander publicly doubted whether class size reduction was an effective policy. I welcome her conversion to the SNP initiative on class size reduction. Page 5 of the concordat states that local government will show progress year on year—

Members: Answer the question!

The Presiding Officer: Order. I think that the First Minister knows what the question is.

The First Minister: You must not stop me teasing them in full stream, Presiding Officer.

Local government will show year-on-year progress on the delivery of the class size reduction policy. The Labour members should listen to the dominie and start behaving like parliamentarians.

Ms Alexander: The First Minister might know what the question is, but we have certainly not had an answer. Week in, week out, we get no straight answers. First Minister's question time has become entirely predictable. When it comes to respect for the Parliament, it is unacceptable that week in, week out, no figures are given.

Last week, I charged the SNP Government with legal incompetence and financial illiteracy, which is becoming the hallmark of the Government. The evidence keeps mounting. The Scottish futures trust was uncoded. The local income tax was uncoded. Dumping student debt was uncoded. The reduction in class size to 18 was uncoded. Every one of the SNP's flagship policies is foundering in a sea of financial incompetence.

In four weeks' time, the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning will give evidence to the Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee. Will the First Minister ensure that she finally produces an answer on the price tag on and timetable for implementation of his class size promise?

The First Minister: I will tell Wendy Alexander what is costed: the £800 million a year that the people of Scotland will be paying for Labour's private finance initiative disasters. As she has raised the subject, last week, when I was giving her straight answers, she claimed that the non-profit-distributing model was a Labour invention—

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

The Presiding Officer: That is enough. We do not need any more sedentary interventions.

The First Minister: I have a statement from Councillor David Alexander, the leader of Falkirk Council who pioneered the NPD model, who says:

"Falkirk Council, under the SNP, developed a model that was less costly to local taxpayers than the equivalent PFI model yet the Labour/Liberal Executive blocked this. Even when our amended delivery model did meet with reluctant acceptance from the previous Holyrood Administration we were faced with constant delays and indecision on the part of the then Labour/Liberal Executive."

Will Wendy Alexander accept that the model that is being brought forward to finance schools, hospitals and infrastructure in Scotland is not a Labour invention but a practical policy that was developed, pioneered and pursued by the SNP, with the support of the people of 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-818)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): I have no plans to meet the Secretary of State for Scotland in the near future.

Annabel Goldie: The Scottish Government promised a lot during the past year and is faltering on a number of fronts, but I give credit where credit is due on one area: the Scottish Government's willingness to chart a new direction in the battle against drug abuse, which was evident in Fergus Ewing's statement to the Parliament this morning. I hope that much of the detail of that will be constructively debated next week.

Drug abuse in prisons is a serious aspect of the problem. This year, we are heading towards record finds of drugs in our jails, despite a plethora of protocols, guidelines and initiatives, which are simply not working. According to my information, by the end of the year, drug finds in jails could be up 20 per cent on last year. Does the First Minister agree that the problem is so serious that it is time to stop talking tough and start getting tough?

The First Minister: A reason for the increased finds is perhaps that the matter is being approached rather differently from how it was

approached in the past. However, I accept that drug abuse in prisons is a serious issue, which is requiring great attention from the Cabinet Secretary for Justice and the Scottish Prison Service—hence the enforcement of matters that were perhaps not enforced to the same degree in the past. I do not deny for a second that there is a serious problem throughout the prison service.

I welcome not just Annabel Goldie's support but the broad support in the Parliament for the new direction in drugs policy in Scotland. A whole range of things is required if we as a country are to turn that tide. One of those is certainly for parliamentarians and political parties to rise above the usual smoke of battle and to address a huge underlying serious social problem that afflicts many and perhaps all western societies. We should do that as a united Parliament and get a response from a united people.

Annabel Goldie: In our Scottish jails, the facts speak for themselves. Drug finds in prisons are soaring and yet, unbelievably, no record is kept of either the substances or the quantities that are found. How do we know what is going on? People outside are astonished at how drugs are circulating so freely in prisons, of all places. Surely the time has come not just to get prisoners clean in our prisons but to clean up our prisons. Why are our jails becoming the 21st century drug dens of Scotland? The Scottish Conservatives have published a raft of robust measures that are based on a zero tolerance approach to drugs in jails. Will the First Minister back them?

The First Minister: I will be very happy for the Cabinet Secretary for Justice to examine Annabel Goldie's party's proposals in detail, to arrange a meeting to discuss them, and to compare them with the implementation strategy that is in place to see whether there are grounds and room for improvement.

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-819)

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

Nicol Stephen: Before the election, the First Minister talked to a newspaper about the new Forth crossing. He said:

"If we have a new bridge, a bond issue is definitely the way to do it ... Because it's such an iconic project, that would have a wonderful take up and resonance not just in Scotland but worldwide."

Is that still his view? When does he expect the bonds to go on sale?

The First Minister: As the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth has said a number of times in the chamber and elsewhere, we will specify the funding of the Forth bridge in this calendar year. For the Government to be in the position first to approve and then to specify the funding of that iconic project is a major advance on the previous Labour-Liberal Administration, which could not even decide whether to build the bridge in the first place.

Nicol Stephen: The First Minister should not get his hopes up for the bonds, because his finance secretary has been telling everyone all week that bonds are not possible. The word “shambles” does not begin to capture the position. Before the election, the First Minister said that patriotic Scottish families would be able to buy resonant bridge bonds. Afterwards, his Government says that it is not legal to use bonds for nationally directed purposes. He has promised to build a £4 billion bridge, but his preferred finance plan has been ruled out by his finance secretary. What evidence can the First Minister give us today that his Government has the slightest idea how it is going to pay for the Forth bridge? Or is he scared to tell us, in case the next great kite that he flies is shot down by his finance secretary as well?

The First Minister: The finance secretary is taking forward not just the financing of the Forth bridge but the £13,000 million of capital infrastructure projects that are laid out in the capital investment plan for Scotland. Perhaps, at some stage, the Liberal-Labour coalition will hark back to the previous eight years of delay, prevarication and total absence of a strategy for public capital investment.

I have been looking at some resolutions from the Liberal conference. They call for a moratorium on private finance initiatives, but Nicol Stephen sat in an Administration that paid through the nose for PFI hospital after PFI hospital. We will set out our financial plans for financing the Forth bridge in this calendar year. When we reach that stage, I hope that Nicol Stephen will support the plans and not just abstain as he did in the budget debate.

Jim Tolson (Dunfermline West) (LD): In light of yesterday's announcement regarding the ending of the Rosyth to Zeebrugge ferry service, what will the Government do to attract new operators to the route, and possibly to extend it? What measures will the Government take to support hauliers and holidaymakers who would have used the ferry service, and to encourage them to consider other forms of public transport rather than resorting to their cars?

The First Minister: The Government has been in discussions with the Attica Group on the issue since January and I have made visits to its headquarters in Greece because we regard the

matter as extremely serious. We believe that there is a commercial future for the ferry service, which is vital for Scotland. That view is shared by Forth Ports, which we have been helping in its discussions with other potential operators.

I point out to the constituency member and the chamber some of the factors that have led the company to take its decision, two of which are particular to the company. The first of those factors is the withdrawal of the previous type of ferry in 2006, as the current ferry does not have the same capacity for goods transport and uses more fuel. A second particular difficulty that the company faces is that, although its costs are in euros, its revenue is largely in sterling and the euro has appreciated substantially against sterling in recent years.

Other companies will not, perhaps, face those difficulties. However, the company faces one difficulty that every ferry operator faces right now, as do many businesses throughout the country, but particularly in the north of Scotland: the huge and rising cost of fuel. At some point, the whole chamber will have to recognise that, as industries and key services come under pressure, decisive action is needed to address the issue, which threatens the very industrial and infrastructural fabric of Scotland.

Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab): The First Minister is aware of the efforts of the families of those who were killed and injured in the Stockline disaster to secure a public inquiry into the cause of the tragedy and the lessons to be learned from it.

Is the First Minister aware that, despite representations having been made to his office and a meeting having been held with the Cabinet Secretary for Justice, the families have now been told that means testing will apply for those who want to be represented at the inquiry? Will he agree to look again at the joint ministerial determination that established the inquiry and ensure that those who are most affected by the tragedy can have equal access to representation, regardless of their means?

The First Minister: Along with Patricia Ferguson and other members, I was extremely keen for the inquiry to be established, and that was achieved. We are also determined to ensure that the families get the appropriate costs and representation when the inquiry proceeds. I know that Patricia Ferguson has been engaged in meetings with the Cabinet Secretary for Justice on the matter. I would be delighted to have further meetings to progress matters. Anything that can be done within the framework of the law and procedure to effect that will be done.

Fuel Costs

4. **Jamie Hepburn (Central Scotland) (SNP):**

To ask the First Minister what discussions Scottish ministers have had with Her Majesty's Government regarding the escalating cost of fuel. (S3F-835)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): Scottish ministers have on-going correspondence with the United Kingdom Government to highlight the effect that escalating fuel costs have on Scotland. We will continue to press the UK Government to take steps to mitigate the problems that are presented by rising fuel prices. I wrote to the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 10 March, asking him not to implement the planned increases in fuel duty and to consider introducing a fuel duty regulator. I am still awaiting a reply.

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth has also written to the chancellor, before and after the budget, requesting that the UK Government take great consideration of the effect that changes in fuel duty have on rural communities and that it introduce a fuel price regulator to balance the impact of fuel duty and high fuel prices. The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment and the Minister for Communities and Sport have written to and met their UK counterparts to highlight the impact that high fuel prices are having on both fuel poverty levels and the Scottish fishing industry.

Jamie Hepburn: Does the First Minister agree that there is a bittersweet irony in the fact that Scottish families are struggling to pay utility bills and fill petrol tanks while Scotland cannot reap the benefits of increasing oil and gas revenues as long as control of those revenues remains with the UK Treasury? Will the First Minister outline what steps the Government is taking to remedy the situation and ensure that Scotland does not miss out on the reported benefits of the £4 billion tax windfall that increased oil and gas revenues are set to deliver for Gordon Brown and Alistair Darling?

The First Minister: I remind the chamber that the £4,000 million windfall is in addition to the £10,000 million that was already expected from oil revenues. Given the extent of that windfall, which was not predicted only a few weeks ago in the chancellor's budget, it seems not unreasonable to believe that there is plenty of room for manoeuvre to implement policies to reduce the impact of sky-high fuel prices on the people and industries of Scotland.

The member described the situation as a bittersweet irony. I think that the mood is becoming one of fury in Scotland that, alone among the oil producers of the world and while producing 10 times our consumption of hydrocarbons, we should be faced with an

extraordinary position. While every other oil producer, through sovereign funds and the build-up of huge sums of capital, has the resources available to power its economy into the future, the people of Scotland are left paying sky-high prices at the pumps and the industries of Scotland are left facing escalating costs. A bittersweet irony? It is a massive national outrage, and it is time that we did something about it.

Tavish Scott (Shetland) (LD): Does the First Minister accept that Shetland Islands Council faces an additional bill this year of £1.2 million because of the rising fuel prices to pay for the interisland ferries and bus services? *[Interruption.]* Shetland thinks that this is important, even if some members do not. Those facts are familiar to other local authorities. Given that it is absolutely within his Administration's ability to do something about that, will the First Minister provide assistance to the local authorities facing the additional costs?

The First Minister: I believe that, as a Parliament and a country, we must make a claim on the huge additional resources flowing into the United Kingdom Treasury as a result of the sky-high fuel prices. That must be done because that is where the financial flexibility is available to meet some of the pressures that Tavish Scott rightly mentioned. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Order.

The First Minister: Communities on the islands and in the north of Scotland face particular pressures, but every community and industry in Scotland is starting to feel those pressures. *[Interruption.]*

I hear Lord George Foulkes shouting from a sedentary position. Lord George Foulkes should be aware that, if he talks to them, even his constituents have huge concerns about fuel prices. Why does he not get behind the Government for the first time in the parliamentary session to support measures to reduce the impacts?

Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): We are used to the First Minister being voluble in answering questions for which he has no responsibility. Will he perhaps answer a question for which he has responsibility? He will be aware that there are real-term cuts to the fuel poverty programmes funded by the Government. Will he reverse that decision and enhance the programmes in order to support those who are affected by the rise in fuel prices?

The First Minister: The premise of the question is totally inaccurate: there are not real-term cuts to fuel poverty programmes. In the initiative to reform the fuel poverty action group, we see a determination by this Government to discharge its responsibilities—would that the Westminster

Government occasionally gave a thought to fuel poverty in Scotland.

Common Fisheries Policy

5. Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab): To ask the First Minister what legal advice the Scottish Government has sought regarding the Scottish Government's position on withdrawing from the common fisheries policy. (S3F-829)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): No one seriously believes that the common fisheries policy has brought benefits to Scottish fishermen or fish stocks. We are committed to withdrawing from that damaging policy.

We have established an expert panel to develop alternatives to the common fisheries policy that suit Scottish fishing interests far better. We have already successfully taken greater responsibility and control of our fisheries through policies such as quota reform and the unique conservation credits scheme—unique to Scotland but lauded and about to be copied by many other fishing countries.

Karen Gillon: I refer the First Minister to the question: what legal advice has the Scottish Government sought regarding the Scottish Government's position on withdrawing from the common fisheries policy? Has that legal advice been sought and, if so, what is it?

The First Minister: I refer Karen Gillon to a rather obvious point. The circumstance in which Scotland will be able to effect that policy is when Scotland becomes an independent country. Then, there will be no legal obstacle to this Government or any Scottish Government acting in the interests of not just the fishing community but the people of Scotland.

Karen Gillon: On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

The Presiding Officer: I will take points of order at the end of First Minister's question time.

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): Does the First Minister regret the way in which last week's announcement on fishing quotas was handled? I understand that the failure to consult more fully prior to the announcement has caused frustration in the industry. Is he concerned that, by stirring up yet further tension between his Administration and Westminster, he risks sucking the Scottish fishing industry into a potentially damaging dispute?

The First Minister: I do not agree with John Scott's analysis. There is no serious dispute that matters of quota management are entirely within the province of the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Government and we should give effect to that. John Scott should surely understand that not just some but all fishing organisations in Scotland

support the move to try to vest fishing quota in the communities that have working, practising fishermen. The alternative is to allow a situation to develop in Scotland that has already developed in England, where the vast majority of quota is owned and pursued not by English fishing interests but by the fishing interests of the Netherlands, Spain, France and other countries.

I am sure that John Scott, in pursuit of his free-market objectives, would not want to allow the situation to develop in which there was a mass evacuation of quota from Scotland, particularly when the fishing communities are under such pressure from rising fuel costs. If he does not support that dreadful prospect, for goodness' sake he should get behind the Government's consultation, like the fishing producer organisations, and support the policy.

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab): The country is entitled to know how we would stand in the unlikely event of an independent Scotland. If the First Minister failed in his attempt to renegotiate the common fisheries policy, would he accept the common fisheries policy or would he leave the European Union?

The First Minister: We have already demonstrated our ability as a Government to achieve substantial changes in the impact of the common fisheries policy in terms of quota management. I am delighted that the new constitutional affairs spokesman of the Labour Party has brought such certainty to Labour policy on the constitution. We have now found out that he does not think that an independent Scotland is likely. Believe me that, if his Government in London continues in the performance that we have seen over recent years, an independent Scotland is very likely indeed.

Financial Services Sector (Support)

6. Derek Brownlee (South of Scotland) (Con): To ask the First Minister, in global financial services week, how the Scottish Government is supporting the financial services sector. (S3F-820)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): From day one, the Government has fully supported Scotland's financial services industry. We recognise the key role that the industry plays in the Scottish economy and we are happy to work closely within the unique partnership of the Financial Services Advisory Board, which I am delighted to chair and on which I am joined by both John Swinney and Jim Mather. Global financial services week was initiated by the board.

As John Campbell, the industry deputy chair of the board, said at Tuesday's launch, the industry is grateful indeed for the smooth transition and the rapidity with which ministers and civil servants got

down to business after the election. Scottish ministers are fully involved in the week-long series of events. Apart from my speech—which I will make shortly—at the global financial services conference, I will host a reception at Edinburgh castle later this evening to celebrate the week. Events are also being personally supported by John Swinney, Jim Mather, Fiona Hyslop and Maureen Watt. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Order.

The First Minister: I am delighted that Derek Brownlee has given me the opportunity to inform him and Parliament that, later this afternoon, I will announce an important new initiative arising directly out of that partnership working. Our intention is to create a financial services skills gateway for Scotland. It will draw together key partners that are committed to the success of Scotland's financial services, including the Government, the trade unions, Scottish Financial Enterprise and others such as our universities and further education colleges. I have asked David Thorburn—the chief operating officer of the Clydesdale Bank—in a personal capacity to lead the industry group to take forward that initiative.

Derek Brownlee: I thank the First Minister for his very comprehensive reply. He reeled off a whole list of senior figures in the industry, many of whom he meets in his day-to-day business. Can he name just one of them who supports his Government's plans for a local income tax?

The First Minister: I can tell that the leading figures in the industry support the Government, as demonstrated by *The Scotsman's* poll of only three weeks ago, which showed, if I remember correctly—I am open to correction by Derek Brownlee—that there had been a 40 per cent movement towards support for Scottish independence. I do not know whether Derek Brownlee was counted in the figures but, nonetheless, it is an interesting statistic.

Karen Gillon: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. You selected a question from me to be asked this week about what legal advice had been sought with regard to Scotland withdrawing from the common fisheries policy. That question was not lodged in a vacuum or with regard to the situation in an independent Scotland. It was lodged because the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment's consultation document on fishing quotas, which was published last week, said that the Scottish Government is seeking to leave the common fisheries policy. I therefore asked a specific question about the situation that pertains now, not in an independent Scotland. It is discourteous to the chamber that the First Minister chose not to answer that question, even if the answer would have been "none".

The Presiding Officer: As I have repeatedly said, such matters are not points of order. The whole chamber was aware of the question that you asked—as you said, it was clear and succinct. The First Minister would be equally aware of the question, and the whole chamber also heard the response.

12:31

Meeting suspended until 14:15.

14:15

On resuming—

Question Time

SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

Health and Wellbeing

Homeless People (Services)

1. Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab):

To ask the Scottish Executive how it is supporting services for homeless people and how it will encourage local authorities to support such services. (S3O-3529)

The Minister for Communities and Sport (Stewart Maxwell): The Scottish Government's commitment to settled accommodation for all unintentionally homeless people by 2012 is reflected in the national performance framework. We are taking forward the conclusions of the homelessness monitoring group and the 2012 support project with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. Local authorities have statutory duties in relation to homeless households. Funding is provided through the local government settlement and the authorities' performance in discharging those duties is monitored by the Scottish Housing Regulator.

Richard Baker: Is the minister concerned about the situation in Aberdeen where, because of cuts of nearly £900,000 in local authority funding for the Cyrenians, vital services that support hundreds of homeless people will be closed? What action will the minister take to ensure that the Government delivers on its pledge for action on homelessness and that the pledge is not broken in Aberdeen, so that those vulnerable people continue to receive the vital services that they need to help them turn their lives round?

Stewart Maxwell: In responses to written questions from Richard Baker I have recognised the important role that charities play throughout Scotland, and in Aberdeen in particular, as partners in assisting local authorities to tackle and prevent homelessness. In the north-east of Scotland there are several such partners, including the Cyrenians.

To respond to Richard Baker's question, I expect Aberdeen City Council to assure me that it can meet its obligations to homeless households in the current circumstances. I inform the member that the Scottish Housing Regulator will re-inspect the council's homelessness services later this year. We share the concerns about the many serious issues that were raised in Audit Scotland's

best value audit of Aberdeen City Council earlier this year and we welcome the Accounts Commission's prompt action on that and the public hearings that have been held. I understand that the commission has published its findings within the last hour. I will examine those findings closely before I take any decisions.

Brian Adam (Aberdeen North) (SNP): How will the minister advise local authorities in general and Aberdeen City Council in particular about getting best value from homelessness services, whether they are provided at an authority's own hand or by the voluntary sector?

Stewart Maxwell: We want to ensure that the best value approach is adopted by all councils, including Aberdeen City Council, and for all services, including homelessness services. Local charities have an important role in delivering those services. I am sure that Aberdeen City Council will use the flexibility that is now provided through the Government's concordat with local government to ensure that services are provided flexibly and, more important, that they fit as closely as possible with the needs of people in Aberdeen. It is important that we ensure that the services are driven by the needs of people in Aberdeen. Whether the services throughout the area are delivered by one charity or by many, we must ensure that those services provide best value. They must also meet Aberdeen City Council's duty to ensure that people who are unfortunately afflicted by homelessness, or those who require any other service, are provided with services of the highest standard.

Blood Donation

2. Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands)

(Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what action it is taking to encourage people to donate blood. (S3O-3543)

The Minister for Public Health (Shona Robison): The Scottish National Blood Transfusion Service is carrying out a public consultation exercise as part of its forward strategy review of the services that it provides. A major objective of the review is to increase the donor base in Scotland by 35,000 people—an increase of 20 per cent.

Rhoda Grant: The minister will no doubt be aware that blood donors are not entitled to paid time off when they give blood. When giving blood, I have met people who have taken unpaid leave to meet the critical need for blood. Does the minister agree that, although people should not be paid for giving blood, employers should be encouraged to give people paid time off to enable them to donate?

Shona Robison: Yes, I agree.

Part of the SNBTS's strategy, in an effort to grow the donor base, is to encourage more workplace donations. I hope that employers will make an important contribution by engaging with the SNBTS and by making it as easy as possible for employees to give blood.

Margaret Curran (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab): On Wednesday 23 April, the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing announced the public inquiry into the hepatitis C action plan. I asked about the funding of the inquiry and the cabinet secretary said that

"money will not be taken from the hepatitis C action plan to fund the inquiry. If Margaret Curran wants to look at the budget she will see the distinct entries for both elements."—[*Official Report*, 23 April 2008; c 7798.]

I subsequently tried to find those distinct elements, and I am still struggling. Information originally given by the Scottish Parliament information centre had to be corrected, and—

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): Briefly please.

Margaret Curran: The information was clarified three days later. I am briefly coming to the point, Presiding Officer.

I have been told that the public inquiry is to be included within the health protection budget; but since asking about funding for the inquiry under the health protection budget, I have been told that I will have to submit a freedom of information request. Is it legitimate that an MSP is required to submit an FOI request in order to obtain information about an element that the cabinet secretary said was clear, distinct and publicly available in the budget?

Shona Robison: The money that I announced for the hepatitis C strategy—record levels of funding—is completely different funding from the funding that will be used for the hepatitis C inquiry. It is important that that is clear; I am sure that Margaret Curran would not suggest otherwise.

I am happy to provide Margaret Curran with any details that she requires on where resources are coming from. However, she can be assured that the resources are there and that they are in no way coming out of money that is going towards the important services for identifying and treating people with hepatitis C.

Deep Vein Thrombosis

3. Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive what measures it is currently implementing to ensure that more people are aware of the risks of deep vein thrombosis. (S3O-3481)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon): The Scottish Government has funded the charity Lifeblood to develop a general information leaflet on deep vein thrombosis. It was sent to every GP practice in Scotland in April, together with a covering letter from the chief medical officer and the chairman of NHS Quality Improvement Scotland drawing attention to the importance of displaying the leaflet.

Bill Aitken: The cabinet secretary is no doubt aware that thrombophilia is caused by a gene that is carried by some people and which makes them more vulnerable to an attack of DVT. Is thrombophilia screening available to those who request it, or to those who are at a higher risk of carrying the gene?

Nicola Sturgeon: Bill Aitken will know that the Scottish Government follows the advice that the United Kingdom national screening committee offers on screening programmes. The committee does not currently recommend population screening. However, it is common in Scotland for relatives of people who have the factor V Leiden—the genetic abnormality that can cause DVT—to be offered screening and given appropriate advice. A range of advice would be offered to people considered to be at risk.

Ian McKee (Lothians) (SNP): Will the cabinet secretary encourage all hospital management plans for deep vein thrombosis to include investigations as to whether a serious pre-existing medical condition—not only thrombophilia—is precipitating the development?

Nicola Sturgeon: Given his professional background, Ian McKee will know of the existence of the Scottish intercollegiate guidelines network guideline 62, which offers guidance that covers people admitted to hospital for serious trauma, for surgery or for acute illness. Aspects of the guidelines are currently under review, but the protocols that are in place for dealing with patients in those categories reflect the guidance in guideline 62. NHS Quality Improvement Scotland has done a stocktake on that already and it will conduct a follow-up exercise with NHS boards.

Betting Shop Workers

4. John Park (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what steps it is taking to monitor the impact of violence and abuse in the workplace on the mental and physical health of betting shop workers. (S3O-3562)

The Minister for Public Health (Shona Robison): Acts of violence and abuse against anyone working in a public-facing role are unacceptable. The Scottish Government is continuing to support the campaign for the

protection of public service workers from violence that has been run for the past four years in partnership with the Scottish Trades Union Congress.

Responsibility for protecting workers from mental or physical harm in the workplace lies, quite rightly, with the employer, who should carry out a risk assessment for their workplaces and—importantly—put in place measures to ensure that risk of harm to their employees is minimised, including recording and reporting incidents of abuse or assault and their consequences for the victims.

John Park: The minister will be aware of the poster campaign highlighting violence against betting shop workers that has been run by the trade union community, the Scottish Government, retailers against crime and the STUC. We have seen a successful approach in other industries, particularly in the rail and bus industries, where there has been a joint approach between trade unions, employers and Government. That sort of approach would work well in betting shops. Will the minister pursue employers in the bookmaking industry who are not prepared to display the posters and enter into dialogue with bookmakers about displaying the posters more widely throughout the country?

Shona Robison: I commend John Park for the work that he has done on the issue. He will be aware that officials from the Scottish centre for healthy working lives are already in discussions with the trade unions and employers in the betting trade on how best to tackle the abuse of workers. I look forward to betting-trade employers taking advantage of the support and assistance that is available to them from the centre, and I would certainly encourage any employers who have not displayed the posters to do so. I am sure that such encouragement can take place in the context of the discussions with the centre.

Population Health Trends (West Dunbartonshire)

5. Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie)
(Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what primary care and mental health care initiatives it will ensure are taken forward to reverse the adverse population health trends identified in the “Health of the People of West Dunbartonshire: Needs Assessment” report published in August 2007. (S3O-3558)

The Minister for Public Health (Shona Robison): The unacceptable population health trends that were identified by the report are being addressed by a number of primary care and mental health initiatives including the keep well programme. In addition, the wider determinants of ill health affecting people in West Dunbartonshire

will be addressed through the forthcoming recommendations of the ministerial task force on health inequalities.

Des McNulty: There is some concern that the relative trends in West Dunbartonshire are worsening. That comes out not only in the report but in other research by the Glasgow centre for population health. A particular focus of concern is the number of people with severe symptoms arising from sustained alcohol abuse. Would the minister like the health board to address that issue when it implements the initiatives to which she referred?

Shona Robison: Absolutely, which is why we are investing £85 million of new moneys over the next three years in tackling alcohol misuse, specifically with the brief interventions programme, which is an important way of identifying hazardous drinkers that will be delivered through health boards. That will be a significant element of what takes place in Des McNulty’s constituency.

On the wider issue of alcohol abuse, Des McNulty will be aware that we will shortly launch our long-term strategy for tackling alcohol misuse. It will contain a number of important actions that will help to address the cultural problems that we have in Scotland, which are particularly deep rooted in some parts of the country. I am sure that there will be plenty within that strategy that Des McNulty will welcome.

Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife)
(Lab): How does the Minister for Public Health intend to improve the mental health of people in West Dunbartonshire and other areas, given that the Government will preside over a reduction in the number of nurses entering training for mental health nursing from 550 to 340 in August 2008? Will that number remain stable or will it increase again in order to meet the various Government targets on mental health?

Shona Robison: Those figures are based on workforce planning assessments that take into account all the Government’s policy developments. The member will be aware that there are now four specific mental health targets for all NHS boards, which cover attention to reduced levels of antidepressant prescribing and suicide, the latter with an added focus on increased training of front-line care staff.

In particular, a lot of good developments in mental health are taking place in Des McNulty’s constituency, of which I am sure he is aware. The developments are led by a consultant clinical psychologist, who has been appointed to provide a quality service throughout West Dunbartonshire, which I am sure that Mr McNulty—and, I hope, Richard Simpson—welcomes.

Health Services (Lanarkshire)

6. Andy Kerr (East Kilbride) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what plans it has for local health services in Lanarkshire. (S3O-3548)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon): I have stated on several occasions that I want NHS Lanarkshire to deliver its planned community services. It is for NHS Lanarkshire to prioritise the services that it delivers to best meet the needs of local people within the resources that are available.

Andy Kerr: In relation to local health services, what plans does the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing have for local general practitioner services at the Alison Lea medical centre in East Kilbride, which are currently subject to tender? I recall that the cabinet secretary's party and her colleagues made accusations about the conduct of the Harthill GP surgery tender. In the Scottish National Party's view, the tendering regime opened up GP services to privatisation. It is therefore a straightforward question for the cabinet secretary, as it is now her watch. Can private sector providers or companies such as Serco bid to run the service: yes or no?

Nicola Sturgeon: Under the legislative framework that we inherited from the previous Administration, at the moment, technically, they can. However, I have made it clear that the Government and I are committed to a public national health service that delivers services in the public sector. That is why I am currently considering—as Andy Kerr failed to do when he was Minister for Health and Community Care—how we address the issue to ensure that the situation that he has just described cannot happen in Scotland.

Jackson Carlaw (West of Scotland) (Con): The health service in Lanarkshire, as elsewhere, is testing young people for chlamydia on an occasion-arising basis. The evidence that ministers have received says that there is no need for a national screening programme yet, although the incidence of those who test positive is very high. Within that percentage, pitifully few young men are being tested, and it is young men who are spreading chlamydia. What more can be done to alert young people to the dangers that the disease potentially poses? Is there a need to increase overall the number of people that we seek to screen?

Nicola Sturgeon: Jackson Carlaw raises a very important issue. We are encouraging the opportunistic testing that he mentions; there is also work around partner tracing and the use of postal testing kits. As I said in my answer to a previous question, we follow expert guidance in

terms of national screening programmes and we will continue to keep all those issues under close consideration. If Jackson Carlaw wants to discuss the issues further, I am sure that the Minister for Public Health will be happy to do so.

Respite Care (Brora)

7. Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive what action it will take to ensure Highland Council maintains the current level of respite care at Beachview Lodge, Brora. (S3O-3526)

The Minister for Public Health (Shona Robison): The Scottish Government recognises the importance of respite in supporting unpaid carers and those with care needs, and in sustaining caring relationships. That is why our concordat with local government includes a commitment to make progress towards an extra 10,000 respite weeks per year.

As the member will be aware, it is for Highland Council to determine the type of provision to best meet local needs.

Jamie Stone: Local carers are upset in that particular case because it involves their loved ones being taken far further from their homes for respite. Will the minister instruct her officials to examine copies of representations that I have received from my constituents and evaluate the plans in terms of whether they really are in accordance with the Scottish Government's best intentions?

Shona Robison: I am aware that Highland Council is considering whether Beachview Lodge could be adapted to provide small group living for those people with learning disabilities who are currently supported outside the area. However, it is important to stress that no decision has yet been taken on the issue. Any plans that are taken forward must be within the context of the policy of "The same as you?" and the changing lives agenda.

Consultation events for service users, carers and other stakeholders are planned for June, I understand, and there will also be wider communication around the review. I am sure that as a result of the consultation events, the views of carers and service users will be taken on board.

Peter Peacock (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): The minister will acknowledge that service change can be unsettling for service users and their carers. In such circumstances, the clarity of the information that is provided by the council to services users becomes important. As she says that she cannot intervene directly, will she consider issuing guidance to local authorities on appropriate consultation regarding change in such areas of service delivery to ensure that any

change does not result in a diminution of the care that is on offer?

Shona Robison: I expect any local authority to undertake service change in a way that is clear and that offers service users and their carers a full input into the decision-making process. As I said, consultation events have been planned for June, and I expect those to take full account of the views of service users and carers. I agree with Peter Peacock that service change is difficult, but it is sometimes necessary in order to provide services in a better way. However, it must involve the full co-operation of service users and carers.

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Given the fact that respite care is not mentioned specifically in Highland Council's single outcome agreements but appears in another document that has a primary focus on older people, can the minister advise members how we can scrutinise the single outcome agreements to ensure that, over the next three years, the additional 10,000 weeks of respite care that the SNP Government has promised are delivered?

Shona Robison: The Scottish Government is examining each of the single outcome agreements of the 32 local authorities to ensure that they reflect and are robust and ambitious enough to meet the targets and outcomes that have been agreed. I will give particular attention to where respite care sits within Highland Council's single outcome agreement. The important thing is that the outcomes are robust and reflect the needs of local carers and services users. I also expect the single outcome agreements to be discussed fully with those who receive services in those areas—that would be good practice on the part of local authorities.

Hospital Meals (Assistance)

8. Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive what arrangements are currently in place in hospitals to assist elderly people with eating their meals. (S3O-3468)

The Minister for Public Health (Shona Robison): It is the responsibility of the nurse who is in charge of a ward to ensure that all patients are assisted in eating their meals. The current arrangements include the assessment of patients on their admission to hospital to determine their nutritional needs, including assistance with meals. A care plan is developed for those who need one, which is implemented and evaluated to ensure that any changes in the patient's condition are taken into account and acted on. The Scottish Government is developing national catering and nutrition standards, which will be launched over the summer.

Margaret Mitchell: The minister will be aware that the nurses who are in charge of wards frankly are often too busy to pay much attention to assisting elderly people to eat their meals, and that consequently there is a lack of support for elderly patients in that regard, which is widespread throughout Scotland. Does she acknowledge that there is little prospect of addressing this vexing issue without accurate assessment of the extent of the problem? If so, what action is being taken to record the number of elderly patients who are either too weak or lack the motivation to feed themselves, to ensure that they have access to the necessary assistance?

Shona Robison: The development of the new national catering and nutrition standards followed a review by NHS Quality Improvement Scotland in 2005-06 into standards for food, fluid and nutritional care in hospitals, which recommended that the quality of nutritional care in hospitals be improved. A monitoring tool is being developed that will be tested in three national health service boards from July to September, prior to being rolled out to all NHS boards. It will measure boards' compliance with the new national catering and nutrition standards and assess patients' experience of their nutritional care, which will include assistance with their meals. We will therefore be able to get a picture of the improvements that are taking place, and take appropriate action if they are not taking place quickly enough.

James Kelly (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab): Having difficulty with eating meals is a major issue for Parkinson's disease sufferers, not all of whom are elderly. They can often have off-periods when their movements are uncontrolled and they are unable to feed themselves. What action can the minister take to support Parkinson's sufferers who have to endure a difficult situation?

Shona Robison: Patients' needs should be assessed when they come into hospital, and any change in their condition should be monitored to determine how able or otherwise they are to feed themselves and what assistance they require. I am confident that the standards that I have described will ensure that all patients, including those who have Parkinson's disease, get the support and assistance that they require. We will monitor the situation very closely indeed.

Below Tolerable Standard Housing (Glasgow)

9. Mr Frank McAveety (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what specific proposals the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing has for tackling below tolerable standard housing in the south side of Glasgow. (S3O-3551)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon): The responsibility for tackling below tolerable standard houses lies with the local authority. By implementing the Housing (Scotland) Act 2006, we will give it a wider and more effective range of tools.

Mr McAveety: Recently, I met tenants and residents of Govanhill Housing Association to talk about their concerns about the condition of the housing stock. Will the cabinet secretary consider making available the level of resources that was made available during the first session of the Scottish Parliament for housing in an area with many black and ethnic minority communities? Will she consider putting aside a sum of money, as she did last week to target central heating, to target BTS housing, specifically to enable us to remove as much of that unsatisfactory stock as possible? Finally, will the cabinet secretary consider visiting the area to meet tenants and hear their views about why something more needs to be done to tackle BTS housing in Govanhill?

Nicola Sturgeon: I thank Frank McAveety for raising the issues, which I take very seriously indeed. He is right to bring them to the chamber. I am aware of the tenants of Govanhill Housing Association and their concerns and I know that the local authority has been working with them.

As Frank McAveety knows, I am MSP for the neighbouring constituency and I know the south side of Glasgow very well. I will always be delighted to meet representatives as necessary to discuss such issues. I understand that the Minister for Communities and Sport has arranged to meet Councillor Anne Marie Miller, and I am sure that he will be happy to extend an invitation to that meeting to Frank McAveety and any tenants who want to discuss the issues that he has raised today.

Elder-care Homes (Argyll and Bute)

10. Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive what support it gives to the elderly care home sector in Argyll and Bute. (S3O-3482)

The Minister for Public Health (Shona Robison): We have provided record levels of support to local authorities for their responsibilities, including the commissioning of care services for older people. Our concordat with local government includes a shared commitment to work to improve the quality of care in care homes. Decisions about the levels and provision of care services in local areas are ultimately the responsibility of local authorities and their planning and commissioning partners.

Jamie McGrigor: The minister will be aware of the recent regrettable confusion surrounding the future of the Argyll and Bute Council-run Eader Glinn home in Oban, which caused great distress to patients, relatives and staff. Given the increased level of nursing care that traditional care homes for the elderly have to provide, can the minister guarantee that enough funding has been provided through the concordat to enable Argyll and Bute Council and other local authorities in the Highlands and Islands to upgrade their existing buildings to meet the requirements of the current fire safety and physical environment legislation, thus preventing further closures of otherwise excellent establishments such as Eader Glinn?

Shona Robison: I understand that Argyll and Bute Council is currently reviewing its care home provision, including the development of progressive care centres and more integrated care home services to help more people to remain in their own home and to reduce the risk of people who live in care homes having to move if their needs increase. Clearly, much of that links back to the action plan that came out of last year's Social Work Inspection Agency report, on which Argyll and Bute Council has since taken action.

On the Eader Glinn care home, the director of community services has publicly stated that no final decision has been taken to close or dispose of any council-operated care home, and that the future of Eader Glinn is being considered as part of the council's wider plans to which I referred. I certainly hope that the council will keep in touch with the member about any developments and plans as they are taken forward.

Cardiovascular Disease

11. Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive how use of the ASSIGN risk score would be likely to affect the overall number of people being treated for cardiovascular disease. (S3O-3534)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon): ASSIGN—assessing cardiovascular risk using Scottish intercollegiate guidelines network guidelines to assign preventive treatment—is being implemented and assessed initially through general practices that are involved in the keep well pilot in south-west Glasgow. Given that ASSIGN factors in social deprivation and family history as part of the risk assessment, we expect that it will identify a greater number of people who are at risk of developing cardiovascular disease than did the previous approach. Once people have been identified, action can be taken to provide them with the prevention or treatment measures that they need.

Malcolm Chisholm: I welcome ASSIGN's weighting for deprivation, which is consistent with many studies, including the exciting work of the Glasgow Centre for Population Health. To allay public concerns and some misreporting, will the minister confirm that the effect of ASSIGN will be to increase the numbers of people in deprived areas who are likely to be treated without having any effect on the numbers who are treated from elsewhere?

Nicola Sturgeon: I am delighted to have the opportunity to give that assurance. ASSIGN does not mean that people in better-off areas will be less likely to get the treatment that they need; rather, it means that more people in disadvantaged areas will get access to the treatment that they need. As I said in my initial answer, I expect that the overall number of people who are treated will increase as a result. I believe that the ASSIGN risk assessment approach can be a powerful tool in helping us to tackle health inequalities, given that, as well as the lifestyle factors that can lead to people in disadvantaged areas having poorer health outcomes, in many cases people who most need treatment are least likely to receive it. That is what the ASSIGN approach is designed to tackle.

Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind): My question relates to the scanners that are often used in diagnosis and which can be used for research into cardiovascular conditions. The minister will be aware of the generous donation of a scanner to Lothian NHS Board during the week. Can she put my mind at rest by assuring me and others that—this in no way affects the propriety of that donation to NHS Lothian—the conditional donation will not be seen as a precedent? Will guidelines be issued to health boards on the conditions that may appropriately be associated with such donations?

Nicola Sturgeon: I agree with Margo MacDonald entirely. First, it is appropriate to put on record my thanks to the Royal Bank of Scotland for its donation to the national health service. The bank had always intended to purchase a scanner for the benefit of its own staff, but it decided—absolutely correctly, I think—that instead of 75 per cent of the scanner's capacity lying idle it could be used to the benefit of the research sector and NHS patients. I emphasise that that is at no cost to the NHS. However, I agree with Margo MacDonald that each case needs to be treated on its merits, and I certainly listened carefully to her comments on Monday after the Royal Bank of Scotland announcement. I am more than happy to consider further what guidance needs to be issued to health boards and to seek a debate in the Parliament to allow all members to contribute their thoughts to that process.

Alcohol Misuse (Services)

12. Lewis Macdonald (Aberdeen Central) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive how national health service boards and local authorities should support services for people affected by alcohol misuse. (S3O-3553)

The Minister for Public Health (Shona Robison): We have made tackling alcohol misuse a priority for NHS boards through the introduction of a new target on delivering alcohol brief interventions. We have also agreed a national indicator on reducing alcohol-related hospital admissions as part of the national performance framework agreed with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. We are investing significantly increased resources to help achieve those targets—from £10 million in 2007-08 to almost £25 million in 2008-09—and that money will be routed through NHS boards.

NHS boards and local authorities work together at a local level through the alcohol and drug action teams to identify local priorities and commission and fund local services.

Lewis Macdonald: Does the minister recognise that a brief interventions approach will be of benefit mainly to those in the lowest tiers of need, as defined in the national plan for action on alcohol problems and elsewhere? Does she accept that, often, those who have more complex and highly specialised needs have the greatest impact on health services, short of hospital admission, and on social work services? How much latitude will joint alcohol and drug action teams be allowed to apply funding to best meet what they identify as local priority needs?

Shona Robison: Of course alcohol and drug action teams will have latitude to meet the local needs of their population. However, the policy context and direction that we have set is clear that many people who would be classified as hazardous drinkers might not see themselves as such, and that when they access the health service for other reasons the opportunity should be taken to address their hazardous drinking. That has support across the chamber. Around that, alcohol and drug action teams will be able to tackle other areas within their remits, particularly with regard to greatest need, and of course they will have the opportunity to help those who require additional support.

Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill

13. Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): To ask the Scottish Executive what impact the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill will have on the delivery of services related to sexual and reproductive health and rights in Scotland. (S3O-3484)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon): Until the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill has completed its parliamentary passage and become law, it is not possible to assess precisely what implications there might be, although we do not foresee the current legislative proposals having a significant impact on the delivery of sexual health services in Scotland. The Scottish Government will, however, continue to monitor the bill's progress to ensure that any changes that ultimately are made to the current legislative framework are identified and reflected in service delivery in Scotland.

Patrick Harvie: I am sure that members will be aware of the recent decision by the Westminster Parliament to resist pressure to restrict access to safe, legal abortion. I strongly support that decision, but whichever side of that debate one is on I hope that we can all agree on the need to reduce the level of unnecessary abortion and to address the services that are in place to achieve that.

How will the sexual and reproductive health agenda be taken forward after the period of the current strategy? Will it continue to emphasise the central role of sex education, access to sexual and reproductive health services, including a full range of contraceptive options, and respect for the rights of all people—women and men—to make decisions on their own terms about whether and how to control their own fertility?

Nicola Sturgeon: Patrick Harvie raises some extremely serious issues. Obviously, the issues that were debated and voted on in Westminster last week were issues of conscience, and members who had the opportunity to vote reached their own conclusions. However, it is important that we monitor closely the decisions that are made, because the issues impact strongly on our devolved responsibilities.

As Patrick Harvie will be aware, the Minister for Public Health has responsibility for taking forward our sexual health strategy. He will also be aware of the most recent figures on abortion, which were published this week. Although I endorse his comments about abortion, I am sure that all of us agree that there are some alarming aspects to the statistics, which suggest that we need to take forward the issues responsibly. In particular, Patrick Harvie will no doubt share my concern about the number of people having repeat abortions, which is why we want to give greater prominence to post-termination counselling. If Patrick Harvie wants to discuss these matters in more detail, I or the Minister for Public Health would be more than happy to have that discussion and to seek his support for the work that we want to do.

The Presiding Officer: We will squeeze in question 14.

Homeless People

14. David Whitton (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab): Thank you, Presiding Officer.

To ask the Scottish Executive what is being done to help the homeless. (S3O-3569)

The Minister for Communities and Sport (Stewart Maxwell): The Scottish Government, local authorities and their range of partners are working together to prevent homelessness where possible and to ensure that it is tackled effectively where it occurs.

David Whitton: The minister will know that housing organisations have expressed concerns about Government proposals to extend the use of six-month tenancies to house homeless people in the private sector. They have said that, at the least, that period should be significantly extended. Will he assure us that that period will be extended significantly and that homeless people who are housed in the private sector will not get a worse deal than homeless people who are housed in the social rented sector?

Stewart Maxwell: David Whitton is probably aware that we will shortly consult all relevant stakeholders on proposals to enable local authorities to discharge their duty to homeless households by using short assured tenancies in the private rented sector, when that outcome is appropriate and sustainable for such households. That additional flexibility would help local authorities to increase the housing supply options in their areas and would provide more choice for applicants. The consultation will explore circumstances in which local authorities could invoke that power and will invite views on the conditions that should be attached to its use.

Moving Scotland Forward

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): The next item of business is a debate on motion S3M-2001, in the name of Nicola Sturgeon, on moving Scotland forward.

14:56

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon): I warmly welcome the opportunity to debate how the Scottish National Party Government is moving Scotland forward. Our actions are already making Scotland a wealthier, greener, healthier, safer and smarter nation. The way in which we work is making the Government and public services more open and accountable.

I am proud to say that our record in our first 12 months in office is one of solid achievement. I know how much Opposition members enjoy hearing about that, so I will begin by highlighting just a few of those achievements. We have reduced business rates for 150,000 small businesses throughout Scotland. We have abolished bridge tolls, invested in the Dundee institute for life sciences and established the Council of Economic Advisers. We have frozen council tax to bring much-needed relief to hard-pressed families after 10 long years of council tax hikes under Labour.

We have reduced and will abolish prescription charges to restore the national health service in its 60th year to its founding principle of health care that is free at the point of use. We have saved the accident and emergency services in Ayr and Monklands. We have announced the new £842 million Southern general hospital in Glasgow, which is the biggest project in the history of the Scottish NHS and will be 100 per cent publicly funded.

We are investing £94 million to put 1,000 more police on Scotland's streets. Just this morning, the Minister for Community Safety announced Scotland's first drugs strategy for 10 years. I hope that that initiative will attract cross-party support.

Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): The debate is about the Government's plans to move Scotland forward—about what will happen in the future. I am conscious that the First Minister has not told us much about that, so I give the Deputy First Minister the chance to do so before she gets too far into her speech.

Nicola Sturgeon: I say to Robert Brown that patience is a virtue. If he is patient, we will get to the future pretty soon. However, before we get there, I will finish the list of SNP achievements.

In education, we are working towards a 50 per cent increase in free nursery provision. We are providing record funding for our universities and colleges. We have abolished the graduate endowment fee and restored the historic principle of free education in Scotland.

Those are just a few of the ambitious and decisive actions that we have taken in the past 12 months. More progress has been made in one year than our predecessors managed in eight years, which is perhaps why they are in such a bad mood.

I will refer briefly to the typically greeting and ginning Labour amendment. Outlining those achievements is not self-congratulation; it is just a statement of fact and recognition of a real record of achievement. I suppose that since the previous Labour Government did not have one of those, it might be too much to expect Labour members to recognise one now when they see it.

Although we have made fantastic progress, Robert Brown is right—that is a comment that I will not repeat; in fact, I will probably never say it again. We have much more to do, and in our second year in office it is our responsibility and our intention to take on some of the big challenges that face our nation.

In the next few weeks alone, we will publish the report of the groundbreaking task force on health inequalities—the most in-depth and innovative prescription yet for tackling and reversing the horrendous and growing inequalities in health and life chances that Labour presided over for the past decade.

We will respond to the highly successful “Firm Foundations” housing consultation with a series of radical proposals to tackle the housing crisis that Labour ignored for 10 long years.

We will build on the action that we have already taken to reduce smoking rates further in Scotland with the publication of a new strategy to tackle alcohol misuse, which is without a doubt the biggest public health challenge facing our nation over the next few years.

We will consult on a patients' rights bill, so that patients know what their rights are and can get effective redress when things are not delivered. We will step up the fight against serious organised crime and legislate to reform the law on rape and sexual offences. We will also, of course, give our full support to Patrick Harvie's hate crime bill.

Looking further ahead, we will consult on a wide-ranging marine bill for Scotland, to give the Scottish Government—not the United Kingdom Government—responsibility for marine planning and nature conservation beyond the 12-nautical-mile limit. We will also introduce an ambitious

climate change bill to put Scotland at the forefront of international action on our environment.

There is even more. We will bring forward proposals to safeguard rural schools, with a legislative presumption against their closure, and we will drive forward the curriculum for excellence to provide the best possible learning opportunities for children and young people from three to 18, while we continue our work to reduce class sizes in Scotland—something that Labour has sadly abandoned.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Can the Deputy First Minister tell us—the First Minister could not—how much the policy of class size reduction will cost?

Nicola Sturgeon: If Murdo Fraser had listened at First Minister's question time, he would have heard the First Minister answer all those questions comprehensively. When all of us face the electorate again, it will be this Government that has succeeded in reducing class sizes in the face of opposition from the other parties.

I hope that all the measures that I have outlined will have the support of all parties in this chamber as we seek to set in train long-term solutions to some of the long-term and deep-seated problems that face our country.

Our success over the past year is not only about what we have done; it is also about how we have done it. We are breathing new life into the governance of Scotland and are making Government and public services more open and accountable. We are moving Scotland forward not by diktat but by dialogue and debate. That open, democratic approach is at the heart of our national conversation on Scotland's constitutional future and it underpins our historic concordat with local government.

That new, open approach will go even further. I am pleased to confirm that this summer the Scottish Cabinet will meet in towns and villages throughout Scotland. We look forward to hearing the views of people and communities from across the country. We will shortly launch Scotland performs to show clearly and transparently how Scotland is doing and what the Government is doing. There will be a new era of public accountability here in Scotland.

Robert Brown: Will the minister take an intervention?

Nicola Sturgeon: I will make some progress at the moment—I will perhaps take an intervention later.

In the environment portfolio we will pilot a scheme, which the Minister for Environment is particularly enthusiastic about, to give the public

timely access to the evidence that informs our decisions.

This Government is delivering for Scotland by what we are doing and how we are doing it.

There is another issue that deserves to be debated this afternoon. There is no doubt that as we in the Scottish Government work to improve the lives of people in Scotland, our actions are being undermined here and now by a failing UK Government that is caught like a rabbit in the headlights of events. As our actions to cut business rates, freeze council tax, abolish student tuition fees and reduce prescription charges help hard-pressed families, Gordon Brown's inaction in the face of rising fuel and food prices punishes those hard-pressed families and hard-pressed individuals throughout Scotland. To add insult to injury, as Scottish householders struggle with sky-high hikes in the costs of heating their homes and filling their cars to get to work, Gordon Brown and Alistair Darling are pocketing a £4 billion windfall from Scotland's oil. The SNP Government is clear: that windfall from Scotland's black, black oil should not fill Labour's financial black hole. It should be reinvested now in measures to ease the burdens of individuals and families throughout the country. I have no doubt that as the SNP continues to push for a fuel price regulator to ensure that the cash from higher oil prices helps consumers, Scotland will be watching to see how the other parties vote on that.

The Government has already proved that it has vision and ambition for Scotland. We have shown that we can be trusted to use our responsibilities wisely and we have demonstrated that we are dynamic, forward thinking and more than competent in taking the right decisions for Scotland. We have shown, and will go on showing, that we will always stand up for Scotland and put the interests of our country first. It has been an enormous privilege for each and every one of us to have had the chance to move Scotland forward in our first year in government, and each and every one of us is looking forward to the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.

I am pleased to move,

That the Parliament welcomes the many decisions taken over the last 12 months to make Scotland a wealthier, greener, healthier, safer and smarter nation, including the reduction in business rates for 150,000 small business properties, the funding to put more police on Scotland's streets, the new partnership with local government and the cross-party initiatives to tackle problems related to drugs, alcohol and tobacco; further welcomes the Scottish Government's commitment to more open government and its proposals on proactive publication of material across government and, in particular, the pilot project within the environment portfolio; looks forward to a range of proposals from the Scottish Government with regard to climate change, patients' rights, criminal justice, marine policy, safeguarding rural schools and driving forward the

Curriculum for Excellence, and believes that many of the measures already agreed by the Parliament to improve the lives of people living in Scotland will be undermined unless the UK Government takes action to tackle rising costs of fuel and food.

15:07

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab): I congratulate Nicola Sturgeon on being a bit better than the First Minister was two weeks ago when he ranted to Parliament about moving Scotland forward. However, there is nothing unusual in her being better than the First Minister—it is not saying much. As our amendment says, his statement then contained

“no positive policies for the future”

of Scotland—although I might have added to the amendment “with the exception of the university for sporting excellence”, the idea for which the First Minister nicked from our manifesto. His statement was also, of course, bathed in the self-congratulation for which he is famous.

The SNP Government should not get too carried away by a year in which it has delivered two pieces of legislation—one of which is impacting negatively on a significant group of students—plus a few headline-grabbing initiatives, including scrapping bridge tolls and freezing the council tax, which have led to damaging consequences for the environment and the provision of local government services respectively.

Of course we welcome the cross-party initiatives on tobacco, alcohol and drugs that the motion refers to—indeed, I was pleased to defend the Scottish Government’s recent anti-smoking initiatives on “Riddoch Questions” on Friday in the absence of the minister—but we must ask ourselves whether some at least of the £165 million that has been spent on the business rates reduction that the motion trumpets could not have been transferred to the central heating programme for older people, which the cabinet secretary effectively scrapped last week.

When it comes to the future, of course we welcome more open government in relation to the environment and everything else, but it would be useful to know at least something about what is proposed. We looked forward to substantive and effective proposals on the issues that the motion refers to, but what did we find? The motion mentions criminal justice, but where is the long-promised criminal justice bill and the proposals for robust community sentencing? Those are the essential prerequisite of any changes to prison policy. The motion refers to climate change, but what has happened to the SNP’s manifesto commitment on binding annual carbon reduction targets of 3 per cent? Where are the practical measures to make an overall 80 per cent

reduction achievable? Sarah Boyack outlined such measures in her excellent speech yesterday.

The motion also refers to the curriculum for excellence, but I suppose that the Scottish Government could not have anticipated the extensive coverage in *The Scotsman* this morning about the ineffective implementation of our important initiative to raise educational standards, which is now floundering in vagueness and is so inadequately resourced. Those are the presumed successes that the SNP chooses to mention in its motion, not daring, of course, to refer to its flagship policies on the local income tax, reduced class sizes and the Scottish futures trust, all of which are falling apart at the seams as we speak.

The legality of the local income tax was questioned by a leading lawyer yesterday, but legality apart, the local income tax simply will not raise the necessary money to keep services at their current levels unless it is set at a rate that would hammer ordinary hard-working families.

Nicola Sturgeon: I am really reluctant to interrupt this marvellous impression of the Rev I M Jolly, but would Malcolm Chisholm care to address some of the policy announcements that I have just made about the things that we are going to do over the next year? We could have a real debate if he would stop moaning and address some of the substance.

Malcolm Chisholm: I have referred to several of the policy areas that Nicola Sturgeon mentioned and I will refer to several more in a moment. I understand that the SNP does not like to hear any criticism of its policy failures, but I remind her that that is part of parliamentary debate.

Class size reductions will not happen either, as we were told yesterday by the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland, without £420 million, which simply is not there in local authority budgets. The Scottish futures trust is such a shambles that it is hard to know where to start. Perhaps the kindest thing to say is that the SNP now appreciates the advantages of public-private partnerships, but it does not want to tell the small number of its more left-inclined back benchers. In the meantime, vital building projects slow down or grind to a halt and Scottish infrastructure, including new schools in Edinburgh, shows precious little sign of moving forward.

If those are the SNP manifesto commitments that are running into the sand, what about those that have not yet seen the light of day? We have got so used to the idea of broken promises that some people are beginning to think that they are just a normal feature of government. However, a few days ago I was talking to a fairly senior civil servant who reminded me of how the previous Administration fulfilled well over 90 per cent of the

commitments in its partnership agreement, which was a combination of manifesto commitments from the Labour and Liberal Democrat parties. To be fair, he pointed out that that was very high in comparison with UK Governments in the last century, but does the SNP really want to be worse than those?

I will not go through all the broken promises today. In order to save time, I merely ask the cabinet secretary—or whoever is to reply to the debate—to answer the questions that Wendy Alexander asked the First Minister two weeks ago today.

The cabinet secretary's motion refers to "the new partnership with local government",

but not, unsurprisingly, to the funding attached to it. The concordat contained a specific set of spending commitments costed in the SNP manifesto at £634 million, but funded at £223 million in the local government settlement. That is a shortfall of £411 million. The shortfall would be even greater if we were to accept the costings that the directors of education gave yesterday. The situation is compounded, of course, by the use of block grant to freeze council tax, thereby reducing the resources available for investment in services as well as removing from councils fiscal autonomy to meet needs through local budgeting.

As a result, many local people in many local authorities are already suffering. Colleagues might provide other examples, but in my local authority area, the contrast between the rhetoric of Government policies and the reality on the ground is very stark in a range of areas such as class sizes, nursery provision, home care services and wider access to the arts.

As I am shadow minister for culture, perhaps I should say more about that last point. People have noticed over the past year how the Scottish Government likes to talk a good game about support for the arts, but the catalogue of troubles grows by the day. First, there was the axing of cultural co-ordinators, who were vital to ensuring wider access to the arts. Then there was the widespread confusion and concern about the Creative Scotland Bill and, according to the Finance Committee, its worst-ever financial memorandum. Now a Scottish nationalist Government is presiding over wide-ranging cuts to traditional Scottish arts and Scottish language dictionaries. Perhaps the Scottish Government could start moving forwards rather than backwards in that important area.

Brian Adam (Aberdeen North) (SNP): The member has just given us a long litany of budget areas that he believes are terrible for the people of Scotland. If that is the case, why did he not join

the honourable Cathie Craigie in voting against the budget?

Malcolm Chisholm: Brian Adam knows fine well that we proposed a large number of amendments to the budget—indeed, far more in one year than his party proposed in eight.

We are talking about moving forwards, but when are we going to get any movement at all on housing policy? I believe that last week the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing gave a commitment to the Local Government and Communities Committee that she would announce local authority housing allocations this week, a record eight weeks into the new financial year and 12 or more weeks too late. Whether or not they have been announced, I have not seen them yet, but the situation typifies a more general dithering and delay over housing policy.

An even more serious matter is the prospect of a Scottish nationalist Government presiding over the destruction of the most significant and most distinctively Scottish innovation in Scottish urban policy over the past 30 to 40 years: community-based housing associations. I wanted to say more on that subject, but I am in my final minute.

I, of course, support Murdo Fraser's amendment, which refers to Scotland remaining part of the United Kingdom. However, I have to say that at last night's *Scotsman* debate I was astonished to hear Nicola Sturgeon's statement that she could not accept my preferred referendum question about Scotland remaining part of the United Kingdom, on the ground that she in some sense supported it. Perhaps we should recognise progress on that matter—or perhaps Ms Sturgeon has simply recognised that the people of Scotland will always vote to remain part of the UK.

I cannot accept the Liberal Democrats' amendment, as it would knock out ours. However, they are right to emphasise the need for the Scottish Government

"to bring forward a coherent energy strategy".

That is one of the essential responses to the challenge presented not only by climate change but by rising fuel prices.

The UK Government has been very active in addressing the problem of international oil supply and in implementing a coherent demand reduction policy. It would be interesting to know what the Scottish Government is doing in the areas for which it has responsibility, instead of doing what it always does best—blaming the Westminster Government.

I move amendment S3M-2001.2, to leave out from first "welcomes" to end and insert:

"condemns the self-congratulation and lack of positive policies for the future in the First Minister's statement on Moving Scotland Forward on 14 May 2008; recognises the many SNP broken promises on a whole range of manifesto commitments, from dumping student debt to providing a £2,000 grant to first-time buyers, and calls on the Scottish Government to bring forward substantive policies to address climate change, skills development, affordable housing shortages, health inequalities and the other big challenges that confront Scotland."

15:17

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I enjoyed Malcolm Chisholm's speech, but I would advise him and other Labour speakers to stay off the subject of referendums for the rest of the afternoon.

It is ironic that this debate on moving Scotland forward comes from a Government whose members this morning will have woken up to some of the worst headlines that it has had since it took office just over a year ago. Yesterday truly was wobbly Wednesday for the Government, as it hit a new low in its forward plans. The proposals for the so-called local income tax were savaged at the Local Government and Communities Committee. The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning, Fiona Hyslop, was left flapping in the wind over class size reductions—she was followed in that flapping by the First Minister and, just now, by the Deputy First Minister, who was unable to answer the simple question of how much the policy will cost. Moreover, yesterday, the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth gave a pitiful performance in his statement on the Scottish futures trust, which as every day goes by looks more and more like the public-private partnership/private finance initiative model that it was supposed to replace. One by one, the Government's flagship policies are falling apart, and the scheduling of the debate could not have been more helpful in allowing us to expose its failings.

Far from moving forward, Scotland is going backwards in far too many areas. Occasionally, the SNP has talked a good game but, when it comes to the crunch, it all too often reverts to type and goes back to its tired old left-wing roots. For a start, it abhors any attempt to involve the private sector in public services, even if such a move will deliver to taxpayers savings in health, education or justice. For reasons of pure ideology, the SNP is vehemently opposed to our proposals—now adopted even by the Liberal Democrats—to mutualise Scottish Water, which would free up £200 million of taxpayers' money every year.

With regard to justice, the SNP is intent on creating a soft-touch Scotland. By letting more and more prisoners out of jail rather than building the prison capacity that we need, it is making a

mockery of the Scottish justice system. It is little wonder, then, that sheriffs are criticising it. However, instead of responding to those criticisms, SNP ministers simply carry on down the same road with more enthusiasm than ever before.

When it comes to education, it is now clear that the class size reduction policy is simply not affordable or deliverable. Even when legislation has been passed, problems remain. The graduate endowment may have been abolished, but postgraduate students now face a demand for immediate payment of the graduate endowment as a consequence. The Government is not lifting a finger to help them.

Even a broken clock is right twice a day. I accept that there have been good things from the Government, albeit that, in the main, they were borrowed from our manifesto. Tolls on the Forth and Tay bridges have been abolished, which we welcome, and the previous Labour and Liberal Democrat Executive's decision to close the accident and emergency units at Ayr and Monklands hospitals has been reversed, which we welcome, too. We particularly welcome the new drugs policy for Scotland, which the Government announced today, the extra 1,000 police officers, and the accelerated cuts in business rates for 150,000 small businesses. All that was delivered by the SNP Government as a result of Conservative pressure as part of the budget process.

George Foulkes (Lothians) (Lab): How can Murdo Fraser say that he welcomes the extra 1,000 police officers when the figure that I was given in reply to a parliamentary question shows that there are fewer police officers now than there were when the SNP took over?

Murdo Fraser: The Labour Party is not in any position to lecture anyone on police numbers. We will hold the SNP to its promises and ensure that we get the extra 1,000 police officers. We will play the role of a constructive Opposition.

Robert Brown is fond of penning letters to the newspapers in which he accuses the Conservatives of sucking up to the SNP. *[Interruption.]* In response to the mutterings that I hear from members on the Liberal Democrat benches to my left, I remind them that it was their votes that pushed through the abolition of the graduate endowment. Liberal Democrats did that without any thought for the impact of abolition on the higher education budget. They also supported the SNP in its blinkered opposition to the building of new nuclear power stations in Scotland. No doubt, the Liberal Democrats will support plans for a local income tax. Truly, the difference between the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats is not that we support the SNP on occasion and that

they do not; it is simply that when we support the SNP we ensure that we get something in return, whereas they are happy to offer something for nothing. If Dr Faustus had been a Liberal Democrat, the devil would have got a very cheap deal.

Looking ahead, there are areas where we will continue to work with the SNP Government. I am interested in its proposal to safeguard rural schools. I am also interested in working with the Government on promoting and giving every young person the right to access outdoor education. I am further interested in its transport proposals and in delivering improved connectivity for our nation.

In our amendment, we urge the SNP Government to work closely and constructively with our country's other Government in Westminster. All too often, the SNP has taken a confrontational approach in seeking to stir up conflicts with Westminster. That is not in the wider interests of our nation. The SNP is putting its narrow pursuit of separation ahead of what is good for Scotland's people. It is time for the Parliament to tell the Government to start putting Scotland's interests first. The Government has to accept that the great majority of Scots believe in the United Kingdom and its benefits.

If anything epitomises the emptiness at the heart of the SNP agenda, it is surely the so-called national conversation. It is a complete waste of taxpayers' money, given that the result has been only 130 letters, at a cost to the taxpayer of £150,000—or more than £1,000 per reply. It is time for the SNP Government to ditch the ludicrous national conversation and get on with the real job of moving Scotland forward.

I hope the Parliament sends a clear message to the SNP Government at decision time tonight that it is time to stop picking unnecessary fights with Westminster and time to start delivering.

I have pleasure in moving amendment S3M-2001.2.1, to insert at end:

"and further calls on the Scottish Government to work constructively with Her Majesty's Government on these and other issues for the benefit of the Scottish people, thus demonstrating the benefits of our historic union with England, Wales and Northern Ireland, a union which continues to attract overwhelming public support."

15:24

Ross Finnie (West of Scotland) (LD): In the recent housing debate, I pointed out that, one year after the election, Liberal Democrats are looking to the Government to provide a different form of debate than that which we heard a year ago.

A year ago, it was perfectly legitimate for the Government to proclaim its manifesto and what it might or might not do. A year on, in holding the

Government to account, the Parliament is entitled to look for more substance in Government statements and in relation to the difficult decisions that it has to take, and not just a repetition of some of the populist measures that it has announced.

I illustrate the point with a reference to the Government's outcome targets and to what the cabinet secretary described in her speech as the historic concordat with local government. Liberal Democrats support the move away from an input-driven agenda to an outcome-driven one but, when the Government is asked one year on about the delivery of mental health services or class size reductions, it is not acceptable for ministers to refer members to the concordat.

Setting outcome targets and signing the concordat are inputs, not outcomes. One year on, the Parliament is entitled to be told of the outcomes that have been achieved, or the progress that has been made towards achieving them. Therefore, it is really not good enough for the Government simply to repeat to us the statement that that document has been signed. We acknowledge its importance, but it is not the answer when Opposition parties ask those questions.

The Liberal Democrat amendment makes it clear that we are keen to support some of the measures that the Government promotes. It is nonsense to suggest that every area of politics involves great party divides. We will certainly support the cross-party initiatives on tackling drug, alcohol and tobacco misuse to which the cabinet secretary referred. We are also happy to support the commitment on the previous Government's curriculum for excellence, to which Malcolm Chisholm referred, although we hope that this morning's newspaper reports that the Government is in danger of fouling up that excellent policy, which it inherited from its predecessors, are wide of the mark.

Liberal Democrats also welcome the pilot scheme on environmental information that Michael Russell is promoting, which is admirably aimed at greater openness and transparency. However, we suggest that, six years after the passage of the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002—I do not know how on earth it was passed; the current Government believes that the Scottish calendar began in May 2007, so it is difficult to believe that we passed that excellent act in 2002—there is an irrefutable case for examining the range of bodies that the act covers. That would chime with greater transparency.

The Government has failed to address some issues. For example, the cabinet secretary made much of the UK Government's failure to mitigate the price increases in fuel—the Liberal Democrats

support that position. The SNP MEP Alyn Smith has said:

"I cannot emphasise enough how important"

producing a coherent energy strategy is—I do not often agree with him, but I agree with that quotation.

However, in 2007, Jim Mather promised us an

"energy policy in Scotland by the end of the year."—[*Official Report, Written Answers*, 6 September 2007; S3W-2348.]

In February, energy policy was "ongoing". In April, the First Minister told the Parliament that Jim Mather would set out the strategy "in the coming weeks" but, by the beginning of this month, Jim Mather, whose lexicon of management speak has elevated obfuscation to an art form, told us that he would set it out "next month". Clearly, the First Minister omitted to tell us that he had not intended to imply consecutive weeks. There is still no energy policy—if it was not so serious, the position would be risible.

Individually and collectively, students feel that they have been let down. One has only to speak to the National Union of Students and students in any constituency to find that out. It would go a long way towards easing their individual plights if the Government was to introduce proposals for a minimum income guarantee for students—as agreed by the Parliament.

We also need more substance on addressing the problems that are associated with our disadvantaged young people and children.

Murdo Fraser: I am interested in Ross Finnie's plans for a minimum income guarantee for students. Will he tell us at what level that minimum income would be set, how much it would cost and where the money would come from?

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): Mr Finnie, you are in your last minute.

Ross Finnie: That will rather reduce the detail that I would normally have been delighted to supply—what an unfortunate intervention from the chair. The figure is £7,000 and we would be delighted to discuss the proposal with Murdo Fraser.

The previous Government promoted the working families fund, sure start Scotland and the multiple and complex needs initiative. We need to know where the people whom those measures targeted stand now.

We would have no difficulty in supporting the Conservative party if it was simply talking about the United Kingdom, but I am bound to say that I do not really support a party whose ambition, which might appear at first to be laudable, is to have a higher per capita prison population than

that of Turkey. I say to the Tories that that ambition may be many things, but it does not have a lot to do with justice.

I hope that the Government will stop pretending that the calendar started in May 2007. I do not think that that is sensible. I hope that it will start to report on outcomes, not inputs, and that the debate on moving Scotland forward, which can and should be a sensible debate for the Parliament to engage in, can be more positive. I hope that the Government will address the clear gaps in its current policy initiatives.

I move amendment S3M-2001.1, to leave out from first "welcomes" to end and insert:

"is concerned that the First Minister's statement on Moving Scotland Forward lacked substance, failed to justify the many promises broken by the SNP over the last 12 months and failed to address the long-term issues facing Scotland; welcomes the cross-party initiatives to tackle problems related to drugs, alcohol and tobacco, the commitment to drive forward the previous administration's Curriculum for Excellence and the pilot scheme on environmental information; calls for a substantial extension of the bodies covered by the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002; believes that the statement was a missed opportunity to bring forward a coherent energy strategy; calls for the introduction of a minimum income guarantee for students, and further calls on the Scottish Government to empower children and young people to have the best possible start in life by attacking the causes of early disadvantage."

15:30

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP):

I am delighted to participate in a debate that celebrates our first-ever SNP Government, which is delivering for Scotland. I do not want to repeat the long, long list of SNP achievements of the past year—many of which were touched on by the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing—because the debate is about moving Scotland forward.

Let us therefore talk about some of the things that the SNP will be doing over the next three years. For example, the SNP Government will more than double the budget for tackling drug and alcohol misuse and for investment in smoking cessation. For the first time, all teenage girls will be vaccinated against cervical cancer and more than £10.6 million will be invested in improved eye care services.

The SNP Government will invest £1.47 billion over three years in affordable housing as part of a strategy to increase house building from 24,000 a year to 35,000 a year by 2015. That is in sharp contrast to the Labour-Liberal Executive, which—I point out to Mr Chisholm—oversaw in its last year a 31 per cent decrease in registered social housing builds. That was the lowest level since the Parliament began. The SNP Government will

abolish the right to buy new council houses in order to encourage local authorities to build homes again. North Ayrshire Council, in my constituency, built only five houses in 12 years. A new £25 million fund will assist councils.

Malcolm Chisholm: Does Kenneth Gibson agree that the £25 million for council houses will build about 100 council houses, compared with the 36,000 social rented houses that we built in eight years in office?

Kenneth Gibson: Malcolm Chisholm presided over a 50 per cent increase in homelessness, from 24,000 to 36,000, which is shameful. It is quite clear that the money for council housing is to kick-start the new build.

The record investment of £5.24 billion in higher and further education over three years will keep Scotland at the cutting edge of the knowledge economy.

Scotland's first marine bill to protect our seas and coasts will be introduced this year. As Mr Finnie will be interested to know, the renewable energy target for electricity will be increased from 40 per cent to 50 per cent by 2020. This year, the Glendoe scheme will come on stream and will provide hydroelectric power for 250,000 additional homes.

Let us not, however, think about what we in Parliament have to say; rather, let us think about what the great and the good of Scotland have to say about the SNP Administration. Let me quote some individuals who appeared in a feature headed "Reasons to be cheerful" in *Scotland on Sunday* on 20 April. James MacMillan, the composer, said:

"I am not a natural SNP supporter, but I have to concede that their level of political efficiency and intelligence blows the other lot out of the water. Compared to the present Government, Scottish Labour looks sleazy, moronic and corrupt."

John Haldane, professor of philosophy at the University of St Andrews, said:

"The SNP has ... shown itself to be capable of forming a functioning minority administration. The latter achievement has swept away the 'it can't work' objection, and the SNP is now engaged in a fascinating attempt to re-envision Scottish identity. With Labour in Scotland seeming to have lost its sense of purpose, and in Westminster its ability to manage the business of government, we have moved further than could have been imagined a year ago towards general acceptance of the idea of Scottish independence. It's 'the vision thing'; and for now, at least, the vision lies with the SNP. Unless unionists can fashion an image of Britain appealing to the Scots' imagination they have no future."

I do not want anyone to accuse me of bias in the debate, so I will quote Mr Sam Galbraith, former Labour minister, who said in the same article:

"The SNP Government has been very poor."

Let us move on to what other people had to say. John Byrne, the famous playwright, said that

"There is something in the air since they got in. Something has changed. Things feel more positive. Although I can't put a finger on anything in particular... there is just a better feeling in Scotland."

The writer Janet Paisley said:

"I feel a lot more optimistic about things. I think that people are now a lot more positive about Scotland. It's good that there are no more tolls on the road bridges and they have frozen the council tax. I just hope that people will believe much more in Scotland. We have so much to offer the world. Maybe we shall finally get rid of the Scottish cringe."

That will perhaps not happen for the majority of members, but it might for the people of Scotland.

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): Will the member take an intervention?

Kenneth Gibson: I am always happy to take an intervention from my good friend Mr Johnstone.

Alex Johnstone: The member's talent for selective quotation makes me want to inquire whether his speech is made up of letters that are cut out of the newspapers.

Kenneth Gibson: Unfortunately, I do not have access to Alex Orr's back catalogue.

Mr Foulkes has expressed concerns about police numbers, so let us hear what Joe Grant, the general secretary of the Scottish Police Federation said:

"It's fair to say that the first year of the SNP Government has had the police at or pretty close to the top of its agenda. If I were writing a report card it would say 'great start, keep up the good work'."

I should say to his lordship that the intention is to have 1,000 extra police by the end of this session of Parliament.

Raymond O'Hare, the director of Microsoft Scotland and chairman of the Institute of Directors Scotland said:

"Overall I am heartened as this Scottish Government nears its first year in office. I look forward to continue working with the SNP-led administration to enable further access, in this knowledge economy, to technologies that bring with them economic and social opportunities and great potential to transform people's lives."

Bob Woodward, the chief executive officer of SMG said that

"There's no doubt that Scotland is feeling more confident, more dynamic and more purposeful since the SNP Government came to power last May."

Of course, numerous people have said the same. Iain McMillan, the director of the Confederation of British Industry Scotland, who is no friend to the SNP, said that

"the urgent review of Scotland's transport needs and confirmation of a raft of new strategic transport projects, including the M74 and second Forth crossing, was very welcome, as was the fresh energy applied to improving Scotland's planning regime and reducing the business rate burden on small firms."

The SNP and the Government are taking Scotland forward with confidence to a new, more positive, better and more optimistic future.

15:36

Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): As the Scottish Parliament heads towards the summer recess, we have an opportunity to reflect on a year with the SNP in charge, albeit as a minority Government. I was disappointed by the self-congratulatory tone of the motion, but I was even more disappointed—if not surprised—by Alex Salmond's speech when he presented his moving Scotland forward proposals to the Parliament. It was as heavy on self-regard as it was light on tackling issues of substance for the people of Scotland.

This time last year, much play was being made of the exciting new opportunities that minority government would present, not just to the party in power but to the Opposition parties. It seemed evident that the new Administration would, of necessity, have to negotiate to set the budget or get its programme and policies through Parliament: co-operation, discussion and compromise would be the order of the day and the Government's approach would be tempered by the views of the Parliament as a whole. The Opposition would be expected to resist the temptation simply to be oppositional and instead would seek consensus where possible.

In the first eight years of the Parliament, we had a coalition Government. It is a feature of coalitions that parties must negotiate and seek compromise. An example of that was the Planning etc (Scotland) Bill, on which there was a huge consensus throughout Parliament on the balance that we struck. In those days, the SNP was opposed to that balance because it was too pro-development. Now that the SNP is in government and has new friends, however, things have changed.

Despite the language of a year ago, the reality has been different. From early on, it became clear that with the support of the Government machine and with the authority of ministerial office, the SNP Administration was less interested in the reality of co-operation than it claimed. As I reflect on the year, it is clear to me that a feature of the Administration has been its disregard for, and lack of interest in, parliamentary accountability. It is a salutary lesson about how power works to witness just how far a party without a working majority in

Parliament can go in pursuing its interests and priorities once the power of office is granted to it. Interrogation of policy is dismissed as moaning; raising questions about funding is condemned as scaremongering; and the year-zero mentality persists.

The examples of that disregard are too many to list. We have had reluctance to report to Parliament, dismissive responses to questions from MSPs and ignoring of Parliament's views on key policies. That is coupled with the return, in the figure of the First Minister, Alex Salmond, to the use of abuse, hostility and contempt as parliamentary weapons. Alex Salmond has brought with him from Westminster a political preference for vitriol over reason, boldly answering at length questions for which he has no responsibility, and denying this Parliament the information that it is rightly entitled to seek. The approach of the Administration is an unhappy reminder of the old Scottish Office as run by the Tories—executive power with little or no accountability, and no regard being given to the consequences of actions. This matters, because without proper parliamentary scrutiny, the Government will be left unhindered to its tax-cutting, trickle-down agenda. The people who most need Government action will be abandoned.

On this side of the chamber, we understand the equation of economic growth and shared prosperity, and at the heart of Labour members' concerns is the silence of the First Minister on those issues. In his speech, there was nothing about discrimination, inequality or social justice. From other ministers, we get assertion and rhetoric but we do not get action. The sharp distinction between what ministers care about and what they do not care about is obvious in their certainty over tax cuts and in their uncertainty over funding and delivery of services. We have seen the ending of programmes such as closing the opportunity gap, which has done the hard practical work of delivering opportunity in our communities.

During the debate on drugs this morning, when he was pressed on resources to help drug users or to help communities that are under the cosh from drug dealers, Fergus Ewing told us that he could not just throw money at the problem. However, when it comes to the small business bonus scheme, that is precisely what the Government has done, with not one condition attached. The budget was focused on extracting money—money that should be directed at public investment in services—in order to fund cuts in taxes and charges. It has been estimated that there will be a shift of a stunning £434 million per annum by 2011.

We see the cynicism of a Government that pretends to preside over a social democratic

process, but has an Irish taxation model. It is a deceit and everyone knows it.

The budget has been criticised by equality groups for its lack of transparency. Even an equality statement, the purpose of which was to establish the real impact of policy—as opposed to the claimed impact of policy—on disadvantaged groups, was simply factually wrong.

Opposition to the Government's housing proposals was dismissed by the Deputy First Minister as “absurd”, despite the fact that it was the housing association movement that provided the critique.

As for consequentials of £34 million for the families of disabled children, the money has disappeared. Elsewhere in the United Kingdom, children and families are benefiting, but the money has gone from here and no one can explain where it is. The minister will not even talk to local authorities about the issues that underpinned the funding.

The Government is quick to claim credit, to assert that it is acting, and to claim that it is listening. However, in reality it is cynical in pursuing its goal of preparing this country to exit the United Kingdom. That explains the silence of the back benchers. The Government is quick to find an alibi and to refuse to take responsibility. It is not governing, but is instead preparing for its constitutional obsessions. It should reconsider what it claims is a “programme”. It should do this Parliament and the people of Scotland a favour, and start acting in their interests rather than in its own.

15:43

David McLetchie (Edinburgh Pentlands)
(Con): In this new session of Parliament, government by ministerial statement has become a substitute for government by legislation. In itself, that is not a bad thing, even if it is just a reflection of the parliamentary arithmetic. It provides a welcome respite from the torrent of laws and regulations, and the obscene diet of bills and statutory instruments to which we were accustomed during the first eight years of the Parliament.

Government by statements in the chamber is especially welcome on matters of substance, when ministers make significant policy announcements, or account for their actions, or explain their positions on issues of genuine public concern. It allows members the opportunity to question what is being done. Of course, government by statement can be overdone. Opposition members have to be restrained in their demands for ministerial statements because, of course, they put ministers centre stage. As we all

know, when it comes to strutting on a stage and hogging the limelight, no one does it better or with greater enthusiasm than the First Minister. It is a self-evident truth that there is no greater admirer of Alex Salmond than Alex Salmond—apart possibly from Alex Neil, and perhaps Mike Russell.

The First Minister's statement on moving Scotland forward was a classic of its genre. First, we had a lengthy review of the Government's short list of achievements—the overwhelming majority of which bear a high correlation to policies in the Conservative manifesto. That was the good bit. We then had the glossing over of the inconvenient truths about the fraudulent parts of the SNP's manifesto, which is now coming apart at the seams, whether in relation to local income tax, the school building programme, class sizes, grants for first-time home buyers, writing off all student debts and the use of private finance in public infrastructure projects.

The latter is particularly interesting. The proposed Scottish futures trust is apparently now in the same family as PFI and PPP. Just as PPP was the son of PFI, so the SFT is just a clone with a kilt on. However, the linguistic contortions to which the SNP Government will go to deny the blindingly obvious and to try to hide that fundamental truth are truly amazing. It seems that fine points of distinction are being presented as matters of fundamental difference, with the odd bit of old-style socialist rhetoric thrown in to try to appease the gullible members on the SNP back benches. I was interested to read in the Scottish futures trust consultation paper about the SNP's objection to what were described as “uncapped equity profits”. I would love to hear the supposedly pro-enterprise John Swinney and Jim Mather explain to the Royal Bank of Scotland, the Bank of Scotland, Standard Life and other major Scottish companies just how much the Government objects to their shareholders earning “uncapped equity profits”, and exactly what limitations would be put on the making of profits by an SNP Government in an independent Scotland.

The motion says that the UK Government should be taking

“action to tackle rising costs of fuel and food.”

As we all know, fuel duty is a substantial component of the price that we pay at the pumps for petrol and diesel. Accordingly, it is a perfectly reasonable proposition that fuel duty increases be scrapped or that fuel duty be reduced at this time. However, we also know that food is not taxed. It is therefore difficult to see what direct action any Government can take to tackle the rising cost of food without resorting to price controls. Is that SNP policy? Is an independent Scotland to be a land of profit controls, price controls and—inevitably—income controls? Is that the sort of

business environment that the SNP wants to encourage? I think not.

One of the very few substantive points in the First Minister's statement was the announcement that Scotland would be adopting the model known as Virginia performs—a model of public accountability to track the performance of Government in a range of public services, which was pioneered in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Last April, as part of the Scottish Parliament delegation, I had the opportunity to meet Virginia's most impressive Governor, Tim Kaine, and to have a briefing from him and his senior officials on how Virginia performs works. Two things struck me in the course of that meeting. First, I was struck by the bipartisan approach by Republicans and Democrats to Virginia performs. Leading members of both parties are members of the council on Virginia's future, and are appointed by the Governor, along with business leaders, to advise him on policy issues. That bipartisan approach is entirely absent from the approach of the present Scottish Government. Secondly, performance measurement and public accountability are very much the key to improving standards and making Virginia one of the top-performing nations in the union.

That brings me neatly to my final point, and perhaps the most appropriate one to be made in any comparison of Scotland and Virginia. As students of American history will be aware, the Commonwealth of Virginia has significant experience of secession from a formerly united nation. Indeed, Richmond, Virginia was the capital of the confederacy. It was truly encouraging to find, back in April, along with my parliamentary colleagues, that Virginia is now one of the leading states in the United States of America: "one nation under God", "conceived in liberty" and united by a common citizenship, a common currency and an economic and monetary union. That is what lies at the heart of Virginia's success. Long may that continue to be our experience here in Scotland.

15:49

Brian Adam (Aberdeen North) (SNP): I enjoyed Mr McLetchie's closing remarks. However, I point out to him that Virginia was involved in secession twice. Is he suggesting that it will be leading the charge to rejoin the United Kingdom in the near future? It might be well placed within the federal structure in the United States, but I hardly think that it will demand to become a far-flung part of the United Kingdom.

I am glad to hear that Mr McLetchie approves of Virginia performs, and I look forward to his approval of, and co-operation in, the rolling out of Scotland performs, which is part and parcel of Scotland moving forward. It not only allows us as

parliamentarians—whether back benchers in the governing party or members in other parts of the chamber—to hold the Government to account; it also allows the people to see directly how the Government is performing.

I am delighted with what we have delivered so far. There are the obvious successes of reversing the accident and emergency department closures, scrapping the bridge tolls and the graduate endowment, and reducing prescription charges. In my constituency, there is the rolling out of the Aberdeen dental school, which will be up and running in the autumn; the commitment of funding for the Olympic-sized swimming pool in Aberdeen in time for the Commonwealth games; and significant progress on a long-standing infrastructure project that is desperately needed for the north-east—the Aberdeen western peripheral route. In the past few days, the details of the public local inquiry that is to be held on the western peripheral route—not on whether we will have such a route, but on how it will be delivered—have been announced.

We have had a series of positive engagements with the people outwith the Parliament—hence the optimistic mood to which some of my colleagues have referred—and with at least some members of the Scottish Parliament in order that we can move forward. That has perhaps been as much a necessity as it has been something to be desired, but it works.

Robert Brown: Will the member give way?

Brian Adam: I am happy to take an intervention from Mr Brown.

Robert Brown: In those ventures outside Parliament, was any information given about the cost of reducing class sizes, for example? We in Parliament have asked for the figures for so long.

Brian Adam: I admire Robert Brown's tenacity and his focus on a particular detail, but such numbers are not important. It is about whether we will, by the end of the current session of Parliament, have made significant progress towards reducing primary 1 to primary 3 classes that currently have more than 18 pupils. I am confident, given the detail of the concordat and the single outcome agreements, that that will be delivered through a level of co-operation that has not been seen in Scotland for many years. Perhaps Mr Brown should focus more on the outcomes than on the inputs.

The Government has not only been co-operative within Parliament, but has bent over backwards to be so. We have had the opportunity to hear not only what the Government wants to debate, but what the Opposition wants to debate in Government time. Mr McLetchie rightly referred to the fact that the Opposition has demanded many

statements and debates. Most of those that have been demanded so far have been delivered—this is one of them. At the start of the debate, barely a handful of Labour members were present to hear what the Government had to say and to hold us to account. I am delighted to see that rather more of them are here now than were here at the beginning—

George Foulkes: Will the member give way?

Brian Adam: That includes Lord Foulkes—I am happy to give way to him.

George Foulkes: I am enjoying the member's speech. It is fantastic and very interesting, but it is divorced from reality. He talks about a great dynamic Scotland and about interfacing with the people and bringing them on board. Is that why the press gallery and the public gallery are so packed for this wonderful debate? [*Laughter.*]

Brian Adam: The public are so content with what the Government is doing that they do not require to hear what you have to say about it, sir. This is not our choice of debate—it is your choice of debate. We are quite happy to be accountable not just for what we have done, but for what we will do.

Labour members have been at great pains to tell us how terrible the budget is. However, when push came to shove, other than the courageous Cathie Craigie, none of them had the courage to vote against the budget. Yet, they continue to come here and tell us daily what an awful budget it is. Johann Lamont told us that all the equality groups are against it because it is not transparent—

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): The member's time is up.

Brian Adam: Okay. In that case, I am delighted—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: No, the member must sit down.

Brian Adam: I am delighted to wind up by saying that I am delighted with what the Government is doing—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Jeremy Purvis to be followed by Frank McAveety. I remind members to address their remarks through the chair.

15:56

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): I am tempted to allow Brian Adam to carry on, as he was digging a bigger and bigger hole.

The debate is about the Government's aspirations and forward plans. One amazing aspect that we have been debating this week is

the Scottish futures trust document, which has been referred to. If members are able to read through the whole document and reach the annex, they will see the Government's estimates of the capital investment that is needed for our education estate. The table in the annex helpfully includes a code for the estimated capital need for local authority schools, with "B", "P" or "A" signifying whether the sum is in the budget, whether it is private finance or whether it is aspirational. The figure for local authority schools is in category A for aspirational. For the benefit of the chamber, I will read from the table the estimated capital need to fulfil the Government's aspiration. In 2008-09, it is zero. In 2009-10, it is zero. In 2010-11 it is zero. In 2011-12, it is £400 million. I do not know the Government's aspiration for the school estate after 2011-12, but parents and pupils need to know now what is going to be invested in the school estate.

Brian Adam and other SNP members—including the Deputy First Minister in her opening remarks—lauded the fact that this is a more competent Government than its predecessors. [*Interruption.*] I hear the cheers from the back benches. However, let me quote from the Finance Committee's consideration of one of the Government's pieces of legislation, the Creative Scotland Bill. The convener of the Finance Committee—an SNP member—said:

"It is the most unreliable estimate that I have seen in my life."

Alex Neil said:

"It seems as if you have stuck your thumb in the air and plucked out a figure. ... I do not see how we can even consider the matter now, given the total lack of reliable information."—[*Official Report, Finance Committee, 22 April 2008; c 398.*]

Andrew Welsh (Angus) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Jeremy Purvis: I will give way, as Andrew Welsh is the convener of the Finance Committee. I hope that I quoted him correctly.

Andrew Welsh: You certainly did. That is an example of a committee doing its work of ensuring financial competence and accuracy. It was recommended by the previous Finance Committee and we have put it into operation to ensure that the civil service gives accurate financial statements. It is all about financial competence. Jeremy Purvis should be praising the committee for that.

Jeremy Purvis: I give the convener credit for highlighting the financial incompetence of the SNP Government.

The convener concluded the meeting by saying:

"I hope that future financial memoranda will, when possible, be much more accurate, to allow Parliament to have accurate financial information before it. Otherwise, we

will not be fulfilling our financial obligations.”—[*Official Report, Finance Committee*, 22 April 2008; c 400-01.]

The Parliament has an obligation to scrutinise the Government's programmes on class sizes, on student debt and on the Scottish futures trust. However, time and again, the Government has refused to publish the information that would allow proper scrutiny. That is an absolutely valid subject for debate this afternoon.

On class sizes, on 5 September, the First Minister said—no ifs, no buts—that the promised reductions in class sizes would be delivered within this session of Parliament. Shortly afterwards, the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning said to the Education and Lifelong Learning Committee that the Government deliberately never sets time frames. On 13 September, Robert Brown asked Maureen Watt, the Minister for Schools and Skills, what the cost of that would be and whether the Government had, indeed, estimated the cost of that policy. Maureen Watt said:

“Of course we have made a bid to meet those commitments.”—[*Official Report*, 13 September 2007; c 1757.]

She was referring to her bid to the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth. So, the Government either deliberately misled Parliament when it refused to state that it had the information on delivery of the promise on class sizes, or it simply refused to tell Parliament and parents and pupils across Scotland. That is not sustainable.

The SNP was perfectly clear about writing off student debt. The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning told the Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee:

“In effect, we will be relieving them of the responsibility, because we will be standing in their shoes.”—[*Official Report, Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee*, 27 June 2007; c 64.]

Then, three months later, Fiona Hyslop said that there was no majority for the policy in the Parliament so the Government was not going to pursue it, which was disingenuous to say the least.

As we heard earlier, the Government promised much from the Scottish futures trust on the school building programme. I see that Mr Russell, the minister for waste management who will be summing up today's debate—which is appropriate—is laughing. However, once again I quote the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning. She said:

“We think that schools and pupils will obtain far better value from a futures-trust funded school than from a PPP-funded school.”—[*Official Report, Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee*, 27 June 2007; c 40.]

Under the Finance Committee's scrutiny on

Tuesday, the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth admitted that PPP is a generic term for all such funding, and that the Scottish futures trust will not fund schools itself, which is another considerable disappointment.

On revenue support for the Falkirk schools scheme, which was lauded by the Deputy First Minister as a non-profit-distributing scheme, and which has a revenue support grant of £5 million for the 30-year duration of the PPP, I asked whether that support would be made available to other local authorities and projects. The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth said:

“Subject to the approval of projects in the normal fashion, the revenue support payments will be made available.”—[*Official Report*, 28 May 2008; c 9017.]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member should wind up.

Jeremy Purvis: Page 22 of the cabinet secretary's document highlights the fact that specific grants will not be rolled up into local government settlement.

If the Finance Committee and this Parliament are to do their jobs, we need honesty and accurate information from the Government about costs. Otherwise, we might just as well pack our bags and go home.

16:02

Mr Frank McAveety (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab): I thank the previous contributor for dissecting the weaknesses in the Government's case. The Deputy First Minister's opening speech was full of words of action and activity. With £30 billion to spend, it is no surprise that she can list some achievements for the Government. It would be disingenuous of me to claim that the Government has had no achievements, because that is why we have Government in the first place.

The fundamental problem with today's debate and previous debates is that the SNP has failed to deliver on the four fundamental issues on which it campaigned more than a year ago. After repeated questioning on television and radio this week about reductions in class sizes, the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning gave no answer. Today, during First Minister's questions, the First Minister was given ample opportunity to specify timetable and costs, but he failed to respond. When his master's voice was given the opportunity to do so during her opening speech, she made no contribution about a timetable and costs. Methinks that something is quite wrong.

The Government has failed to bring any of the major specialists in local government funding to

admit that the local income tax can be delivered legally and will be distributed equitably. Johann Lamont identified her fundamental concerns about other issues in the budget. This week, we found that postgraduates are caught in the uncertainty around the much-lauded SNP position on student debt.

Each and every time that the Government is interrogated, asked or cross-examined, it fails the basic test. When the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland representative, Murdo Maciver, was asked about class sizes this week, he said that there are no funds available for that commitment; I think that he is right, and that that is why we have had no answer from the First Minister or the Deputy First Minister this afternoon. To me, that lack of response is unacceptable. I hope that whoever closes the debate on behalf of the Government responds to those legitimate concerns. As David McLetchie identified—I do not necessarily share his opinion that we had too much legislation in the past—we expect ministers to respond to direct questions that parliamentarians ask in the chamber. There has been an abject failure by the Government to do so.

Today's debate is on moving Scotland forward—I hardly think that even an SNP Administration would wish to move us backwards or even sideways—but the SNP has adopted a moving target to avoid scrutiny on many of the fundamental issues. Just because ministers say that things are better, that does not necessarily mean that things are better. Just as physicians give people placebos to make them feel better, the First Minister and Deputy First Minister have adopted placebo language.

Despite the SNP's year-zero approach to recent history, the previous Administration secured some major achievements. Without the previous Administration's commitment, the largest housing debt in Europe would not have been removed from the tenants of Scotland's poorest city. That was done through partnership with the Chancellor of the Exchequer at Westminster, because that was the right thing to do. However, the policy was opposed by members of the current Government, who no longer have any credible plans for securing similar levels of investment.

Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind): Will the member take an intervention?

Mr McAveety: On health, the previous Administration committed to a major programme of tackling waiting times. The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing is proud to accept that as an achievement of the current Government but, like everything else, the outcome is the result of our previous hard work.

Nicola Sturgeon: Will the member give way?

Mr McAveety: No, I want to finish this point.

To use a school metaphor, the children who succeed in their exams at 16 do so because of the work that they did between the ages of five and 16 before they started to prepare for those exams. Let us have a little more humility and credibility from the Government in accepting the legacy of the previous Administration.

I give way to Margo MacDonald.

Margo MacDonald: Presiding Officer, I apologise for arriving in the chamber late.

The member said that the previous Administration's action on housing debt was the right thing to do. Does he agree that the right thing to do would be to give City of Edinburgh Council tenants an equal playing field by cancelling the council's debt, which is holding back the housing programme?

Mr McAveety: What was regrettable about that debate was that those who are now in government campaigned strongly against our proposal to tackle Edinburgh's housing debt. Members of the Government must now deal with that issue, which exists as a consequence of their language in opposition, as they face up to the reality in government.

I welcome the commitment in the First Minister's statement to a centre for sporting excellence. As Labour's spokesperson on sport, I welcome the Government's conversion to putting sport much higher up the agenda. We ended up spending too much time looking at the structures of organisations rather than delivering credible support structures that can provide sporting excellence.

SNP members made a number of key commitments on which, under interrogation one year in, they have failed to give credible explanations. They have three more years before being tested by the electorate in 2011. I am convinced that much of what they claimed in 2007 will not be delivered by 2011. They will be held to account for that failure.

16:08

Aileen Campbell (South of Scotland) (SNP): I welcome today's debate, which gives us the opportunity to reflect on the past year of achievements of Scotland's new Government and on its ambitions for the future.

When the First Minister made his statement to Parliament two weeks ago, he spoke about how the SNP is meeting its pledges to the people of Scotland and what we have delivered since winning last May's election. The motion before us outlines many of those achievements: the

partnership with local government that froze council tax levels; the reduction and eventual abolition of prescription charges to restore, as Nicola Sturgeon said, Aneurin Bevan's vision of medicine free at the point of need; and the reintroduction of free education to Scotland, which is the country that first introduced the concept.

The SNP's ambition goes beyond what we have already achieved and, indeed, beyond what we can achieve under the limited powers of devolution. We are establishing the saltire innovation fund to encourage business and technological innovation. We plan to launch Scotland performs, which will focus on the outcomes of Government policy. We also heard the First Minister restate the Government's intention to give the people of Scotland a direct choice on their future in an independence referendum.

Only the full powers of independence will give the Parliament the ability to meet fully the ambitions of the people of Scotland that were reflected in last year's election. After eight long years, we are beginning to see devolution work in the way that people thought it could. That is giving people the confidence to think about how much more could be achieved.

Margo MacDonald: The member asserts that seeing devolution work properly has given people in Scotland confidence that independence would work just as well. What is her source for that assertion?

Aileen Campbell: I think that the polls suggest that that is the case.

During the First Minister's statement, I reminded the chamber of the scandal of child poverty in Scotland. In the very week that the First Minister made his statement, we heard reports from the Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights, suggesting that a damning report card on Scottish child welfare will be presented to the United Nations later this year. Sadly, its contents are not really news—we already know about rising teenage pregnancy rates, thousands of underage criminal convictions and the fact that one in four children lives in poverty. That is the situation in 21st century Scotland—a shameful legacy that 10 wasted years of new Labour have done nothing to reverse.

Although the First Minister confirmed that the Scottish Government will do everything in its all-too-limited power to tackle those scandals, he agreed with me that the best, quickest and fairest route to ending child poverty in Scotland is for the Scottish Parliament to have the full powers of an independent state. An independent Scottish Parliament and Government will have control of the welfare state, the power to reform taxation and the ability to reject the managerial, target-

obsessed culture that has stifled the war on poverty in the UK for the past 10 years.

Unionist members may not like that reality; in that case, I would ask them a simple question. Do they honestly believe that, if they were to form the Government of an independent Scotland, they would not be in a better position to end child poverty, given that the London-based Government has so clearly failed? Does the socialist Scottish Labour Party seriously come to this chamber and say, "No, we do not want the power and responsibility to lift our children permanently out of poverty. We do not want the power to mobilise Scotland's oil wealth to help our vulnerable two-year olds, our teenagers who are looking for apprenticeships and our students who are struggling to get by"?

As we move forward, Scotland faces a choice between vision, ambition and confidence for the future, and a mindset that is stuck in the past. My colleague Alasdair Allan recently raised the spectre of former minister Sam Galbraith, who revealed the true feelings of some on the Opposition benches, when he said on the radio that, but for our links to London, Scotland would be "an insignificant little country". To those words, I can only respond with the words of Hugh MacDiarmid:

"Scotland small? Our multiform, our infinite Scotland, small?"

I believe that no country is insignificant. No country is too small to be limited by anything other than the imagination and ambition of its people. Sam Galbraith's is the mindset that Scotland rejected last year, when it chose to place its trust in the Scottish National Party. The SNP Government has done its best to work with those who are willing to co-operate in this chamber and beyond to make a concrete difference to the lives of people in Scotland and, indeed, in the wider world.

The motion touches on that when it talks about climate change—a global challenge that does not respect borders. During the Easter recess, I had the privilege of visiting Zambia with Oxfam Scotland, and saw at first hand the effect of climate change on communities that live in precarious circumstances. That is why I welcome the Scottish Government's world-leading proposals for a climate change bill, the establishment of the saltire prize—one of the biggest international innovation prizes in history—and its commitment to growing Scotland's international development budget and influence overseas.

The First Minister confirmed to the Parliament recently the steps that he is taking to show solidarity with people affected by natural disasters

in China and Burma—once again, doing what we can and hinting at the potential Scotland would have as an independent nation on the world stage.

Our nationalism is defined by our internationalism, and independence is defined by the relationship that Scotland would have with other countries in the United Nations, the European Union, and any other agreements freely entered into.

The Government motion makes clear that Scotland's future is safe under a Government that is committed to putting the interests of Scotland's people first, last and always. We are repaying the trust of the people by delivering on the pledges that we made last year. As somebody once said, we have no reverse gear. We are moving Scotland forward, and showing on a daily basis how we can, and will, be better off with independence.

16:14

James Kelly (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to take part in the debate and to support the Labour amendment. The debate allows us to examine the performance of the SNP after one year in power, to examine its policy priorities and to move on from the First Minister's statement of a few weeks ago, which was basically an exercise in self-congratulation. Unlike Kenny Gibson, I hope to examine some of the political issues; listening to his speech was like watching an edition of "What the Papers Say" as he read out all those newspaper quotations.

The story of the SNP's year has been one of broken promises. The SNP told students that it would dump student debt but, just this week, more than 3,000 students were given graduate endowment bills to pay off. The SNP told us that it would put 1,000 more police on the streets, but we have found recently from a written answer that fewer police are on the streets. I have no doubt that the SNP claims that the health service is safe in its hands but, as we heard last week, fewer double-crewed ambulances than this time last year are on the streets.

That shows that being in opposition is one thing and being in power is another. The SNP has had difficulty in translating the megaphone politics of opposition into the responsibilities of power. That is shown when SNP ministers who opposed PPP turn up at schools that have been funded through PPP with their hard hats and hard necks.

A prime policy objective must be growth in the economy, for which the SNP has set a policy target of matching UK economic growth by 2011. I will give credit where it is due. I welcome the M74 extension scheme that was launched yesterday, as it will contribute to economic growth. However, it is a case of one step forward and two steps

back. The council tax freeze passes cash benefits to higher-rate taxpayers as opposed to lower-rate taxpayers. That will not contribute to economic growth.

Margo MacDonald: Is it an argument in favour of the union that Scotland's economic growth should lag behind that of the rest of the United Kingdom?

James Kelly: We have benefited from the union dividend in recent years. The Scottish economy is stronger for being part of the union.

One of the SNP's flagship policies is a local income tax, which we now hear might be illegal. Such a policy would tax hard-working families and drive talent out of Scotland, which would undermine economic growth.

SNP motions on skills have been defeated twice in the Parliament and the SNP has not supported modern apprenticeships.

Investment in a strong school building programme to achieve a strong education system is important to the economy's growth. It is unfortunate that, as Jeremy Purvis ably demonstrated, that investment has slid to a halt. The Scottish Building Federation has recently complained that the halt in school building and general building programmes is starting to hit the building industry hard.

Much has been made of the Scottish futures trust, which business and unions have widely discredited. Business and unions want certainty and stability, whereas the Scottish futures trust is still on the starting blocks. We heard evidence at the Finance Committee that introducing the futures trust could take three to five years. The policy document talks about using local authority bonds, which have not been used in the 33 years since legislation provided for them in 1975. Absolutely no work has been done on how private finance would be secured.

In addition, as John Swinney told the committee on Tuesday, his favoured non-profit-distributing model is really a variant on PPP. We will have to wait a long time before the first school is delivered by the Scottish futures trust.

How do we move Scotland forward? We need to build the economy by supporting modern apprenticeships. We need a strong school building programme that gives us schools that are fit for purpose. We need safer communities in which more police are on the streets. The SNP is failing on those matters. When it comes to moving Scotland forward, it is clear that the SNP does not have the answers.

16:20

Stuart McMillan (West of Scotland) (SNP): The debate has been interesting. My SNP colleagues have spoken of the many achievements of the SNP Government over the past year, although we have also heard the moaning Minnie collective of the Opposition with scant positives and plenty of moaning.

As a member of the Justice Committee, I am pleased to see the investment of £120 million a year to provide three new prisons. Murdo Fraser conveniently forgot about that when he spoke, but that is not much of a surprise, bearing in mind that the Tories did not build any prisons when they were last in power.

David McLetchie: Will the member take an intervention?

Stuart McMillan: I have just started, so I need to continue.

The issue has been debated numerous times in the chamber, but I do not think that anyone should argue with the measures that are being taken by Kenny MacAskill to deal with the terrible overcrowding problems in Scotland's prisons.

Continuing on the justice theme, I have spoken to various police officers in recent months and the overwhelming consensus is that they are delighted with the actions that have been taken to recruit 1,000 more police officers. There should be no doubt that those officers will be utilised in an effective capacity, whether they are on the beat in Greenock or Govan, Lerwick or Linlithgow or are on some other duty. I am sure that the chief constables will use the extra resources effectively.

The SNP Government may be lambasted by Labour members for many things, but it would be a cold heart that would deny the benefits of the increase in free personal care payments. The increase to £149, and to £67 for nursing care, will benefit more than 9,000 older people in care homes.

I have no doubt that our elderly population would be even better served if the attendance allowance were to be reinstated, so I am pleased that East Dunbartonshire Council recently voted unanimously to encourage the UK Government to reinstate payments for Scotland. That is somewhat surprising, given that the council is a Labour-Tory coalition, but perhaps the councillors' Labour colleagues in Parliament could take note: do not be afraid to contradict Gordon Brown's thoughts on the matter. That does not seem to bother the Labour leader in Scotland.

I like to think that we are all committed in our own way to creating a fairer, healthier, greener and smarter Scotland. The way in which the First Minister set out on 14 May what the SNP

Government is doing to further that cause should therefore be welcomed. Measuring the success of creating such a Scotland by introducing the Scotland performs framework is an idea that has the potential to be rolled out further. The idea of accountability appears to frighten some, but the SNP Government is content to show the people of Scotland exactly what it is doing for them.

The announcement of the Scottish university for sporting excellence, to be based at the University of Stirling, and of the annual £2 million saltire innovation fund are only two examples of how the SNP is providing the basis for a healthier and smarter Scotland.

Alongside those initiatives, there will be a full and meaningful legislative programme. One piece of legislation that I will be particularly delighted to see being introduced in the coming year is the asbestos claims bill. I have campaigned on the pleural plaques issue since being elected last year. The Cabinet Secretary for Justice's bill, which will reverse the House of Lords judgment on pleural plaques, will be a massive boost to those who suffer from the condition and wish to pursue an action for damages. I have met quite a few people who suffer from pleural plaques and I have had dealings with the campaign groups. I assure members that those people are delighted that the bill will be brought forward in this Parliament.

The Scottish Prisons Commission's report is due. Henry McLeish has been reported a lot recently, speaking if not in outright support of the SNP, definitely in support of our many achievements, even though he is not yet convinced of the benefits of independence. I trust that the commission, which he leads, will give the Government a sound indication of the best way in which to deliver an effective prison system. I hope that the problems that have been caused by massive overcrowding and high rates of reoffending as a result of the lack of action by previous Administrations, including the Tories, will be addressed in the commission's findings.

The past year in the Parliament has undoubtedly been a fascinating one for the people of Scotland to watch. The electorate seem happy with the fact that a minority Government is ruling in Scotland, which means that decisions must be won on their own merits. That situation is new in the politics of Scotland and the UK. It is a fresh approach, with which SNP members of the Scottish Parliament are content. After all, we trust the Scottish population.

Johann Lamont: On parliamentary accountability and building support for the SNP's policies, the Parliament has twice voted against a central tenet of the "Firm Foundations" document on housing. We have said that we oppose it, but the minister has described that opposition as

“absurd”. Does the member agree that if the SNP needs to build support, the minister should respond to that opposition and adapt her policy accordingly?

Stuart McMillan: The SNP Government will not take any lessons from Labour in view of the housing crisis that we have been left with.

Being part of the new politics in Scotland has been interesting, and it has been interesting to see a Government being considered to be successful in delivering for the people of Scotland. I look forward to next year, in which the SNP will continue to move Scotland forward.

16:26

David Whitton (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate and support the amendment in the name of my colleague Malcolm Chisholm.

In preparing for the debate, I again read the remarkable statement on moving Scotland forward that the First Minister made in the Parliament on 14 May. Before SNP members get too excited by my use of the word “remarkable”, I should say that one realises what an outrageous exercise in self-aggrandisement the statement was only when one reads it in cold, hard print. It is also worth noting that the organ-grinder of the SNP Government has not come to the chamber to defend himself; instead, he has sent the Deputy First Minister to do his talking for him. That is a pity, but it is typical of him. I have nothing personal against Miss Sturgeon, but I would have preferred the First Minister to have been man enough to come to the chamber and answer for himself. I would like to have asked him to explain in greater detail some of the statements that he made in claiming that his Government is moving Scotland forward. Could he, for example, explain his claim that the SNP Government is ensuring that Scotland’s children get the best possible start in life? How does that square with ending the commitment to giving all vulnerable two-year-olds a free nursery place? I refer to the scheme that the previous Administration piloted.

Kenneth Gibson: Given the member’s interest in vulnerable two-year-olds, will he condemn Glasgow City Council for getting rid of 61 nursery teachers between 2004 and 2007 under the Labour and Liberal Democrat Administration?

David Whitton: Kenneth Gibson’s intervention is like the speech that he made: not worth listening to.

The Minister for Environment (Michael Russell): Oh!

David Whitton: I see that Mr Russell is surprised.

The First Minister said that his Government is working closely with local government to meet the commitment on class sizes. That matter has been well rehearsed in the debate, so I do not need to go over it again. However, I will happily give way to any member of the SNP if they want to say how much the pledge on class sizes will cost and when it will be delivered. I hope that Mr Russell will do so when he sums up.

Margo MacDonald: Will the member give way to a non-member of the SNP?

David Whitton: Very briefly.

Margo MacDonald: Is the member advocating that the SNP should stick to its ridiculous promise on class sizes or that it should consider what is being taught, where it is being taught and by whom it is being taught?

David Whitton: The SNP made a promise to cut class sizes in its manifesto. We should at least be given information on whether doing that will cost much more than the SNP said that it would.

I turn to the SNP’s proud boast about launching a new skills strategy, which James Kelly mentioned. That matter has been debated twice in the chamber and the SNP Government has been defeated on it twice. In his statement, the First Minister said:

“a minority Government can still move quickly to implement its programme and ideas.”—[*Official Report*, 14 May 2008; c 8533.]

I respectfully suggest to the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning that the Parliament has now spoken twice on the skills strategy and that it would be welcomed if she moved quickly and proposed a new skills strategy with substance. The strategy was not mentioned in the long list that the Deputy First Minister read out.

During the passage of the Budget (Scotland) Bill, Labour lodged amendments that called for the introduction of skills academies and an increase in the number of modern apprenticeships to 50,000. Those amendments were defeated, but the demand for a skilled workforce still exists.

The Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee, of which I am a member, is studying tourism and how we can increase income from the vital tourism industry. Witness after witness has told us that there is a shortage of skilled workers and that it is difficult to get young Scots to come into the sector to pursue a career. Yesterday, the Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism, Mr Mather, gave evidence to the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee. When asked about the shortage, he said that it was up to the industry to train its workforce. However, we have been told that, without the thousands of immigrant workers who are employed in tourism, many companies—many

of which are in this city—would not be able to cope.

The SNP response is to cut adult modern apprenticeships in tourism and information technology, the minister's excuse for which is that there was not much of a take-up previously. He might want to consider that it should be part of his job to create the right conditions for young Scots and older workers who are seeking a new career to get the training that they require to enter the industry. He will not do that by just leaving things to market forces and relying on incoming workers to plug the gaps. That is hardly an advert for moving Scotland forward or a long-term solution to a long-term problem.

The First Minister referred to new reforms to enhance further the Scottish Government's openness and accountability. Before he acts on that, I suggest that he looks a little closer to home. Mr Salmond is the First Minister of this Parliament, not the First Minister of the SNP. It would move Scotland forward if, just occasionally, he answered some of the questions that are put to him at First Minister's question time. We are now all weary of his attempts at being a third-rate comedy turn. If he was on Simon Cowell's programme "Britain's Got Talent", he would have three crosses within seconds.

If the First Minister is so proud of his Government's policies, he should be prepared to answer questions about them. To date, all we have had is bluff and, what is worse, a level of personal abuse that demeans his office. That shows disrespect not just to members of the Parliament but to the people of Scotland who put us here to ask questions on their behalf.

Questions have been asked about the conduct of several ministers during the past year. When those concerns have been raised with the Presiding Officer, his reply is that such matters lie with the First Minister. Nevertheless, one year on, there is still no sign of the ministerial code. Why has there been such a delay? Why is the code still lying unsigned at the bottom of the First Minister's ministerial box? If he wants a new framework of public accountability, never mind Virginia, it should start at the top with the First Minister.

16:32

Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): This is one of the debates that the SNP Government did not want to have—and one can readily understand why. Various described as disappointing, vacuous and thin, the First Minister's aspirational statement to the Scottish Parliament two weeks ago was notable only for having no aspiration and containing no future plans. The Deputy First Minister was wise in her opening remarks to bin

the statement and try to dredge up a few answers to consultations to add to the impression that there are things that the SNP Government is about to do. In opening for the Liberal Democrats, Ross Finnie said quite rightly that, after one year, it is reasonable for the Parliament to feel entitled to something a bit better.

The Scottish Parliament information centre always provides at the back of the chamber various papers and documents that relate to the debate. Before the debate, I looked to see what had been provided. There was zilch—not one document, not even the First Minister's statement. That is not a criticism of SPICe; it is a criticism of the lack of content of the First Minister's statement two weeks ago.

It would be churlish not to acknowledge that the First Minister is good on mood music and style. Indeed, he is a First Minister who has built his second coming on mood music, memorable quips and repartee as a substitute for substance and statesmanship. We are given the impression that, under his Government, the sun shines every day, the Scottish football team always wins and all is well under the beneficent rule of Uncle Alex.

The reality is somewhat different. We now have some evidence as to the shape and direction of the SNP Government. In the first instance, it is not a Government that respects Parliament, as Johann Lamont and a number of other members have pointed out. Indeed, the Government does its best to sideline Parliament. The announcement of the U-turn on the Scottish futures trust—one of the central ideas of the Administration—was made at a media briefing, rather than to the Parliament. The SNP was feart to bring it here. Indeed, the absence of the First Minister today, which David Whitton mentioned, is worthy of note. Having delivered his address two weeks ago, the First Minister leaves it to his subordinates to take the flak for its manifold inaccuracy. Is he feart or is his absence an exercise in arrogance?

To her credit, Nicola Sturgeon has never shirked the unpleasant jobs, but the fact that Mike Russell has been put up to close for the SNP is a dead giveaway of who is in trouble. Even Mike Russell knows that the SNP Government would not give him announcements on Government largesse. After all, he is not entirely one of us. He always manages to convey the impression that he believes that he can do a better job than the current First Minister. That is certainly a difficult—and dangerous—course for an ambitious minister to take.

The softening-up referendum on independence, which is the central plank of the Government's platform—indeed, its very *raison d'être*—has not been brought to Parliament either. The nationalists are also feart about that, despite the legions of

camp followers that Wendy Alexander recently brought to their support.

This is not a Government that keeps its election promises. It has made U-turn after U-turn after U-turn, most of which have not been exposed even to a whiff of Opposition gunfire. Promises on class sizes, police numbers and student debt have all been binned, although the last rites have still to be said over some of them. I should point out that when we were in government, we provided 3,000 extra teachers and reduced class sizes. Yesterday, we learned that reducing class sizes SNP-style is likely to cost in excess of £0.3 billion. However, in its farcical alternative universe, the SNP Government has provided enough funding for that. It should tell that to Steven Purcell, who is busy in Glasgow slashing the education budget and reducing teaching posts to balance his books.

The fact is that SNP class size reductions are dead. However, it is a little like the eerie period after Stalin died; no one dares to go and check, just in case it comes back to life. Well, members can rest easy. Reducing class sizes, writing off student debt and providing £2,000 grants to first-time house buyers are all dead under this Government. I hope only that the new Forth bridge, which we heard about at First Minister's questions, goes all the way over the firth.

In an excellent speech, Jeremy Purvis identified with forensic incisiveness the key information that is required on class sizes and infrastructure to allow Parliament to do its job, set out why Parliament should have that information, and made clear the Government's duplicitous approach to these basic issues of accountability. That is an Achilles heel that will, in due course, bring the Government down.

What should the First Minister's statement have contained? Well, it might have had a full-blown commitment to extending the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002, which, as Ross Finnie said, was a benchmark of its kind when it was brought in by the Liberal Democrats in government. However, the act needs to be extended to include bodies such as Glasgow Housing Association, Kilmarnock prison and the host of bodies that now provide public services that were previously the direct responsibility of Government. The SNP Government is lagging not just behind the standards set by Liberal Democrat in government but behind even the UK Government, which has already consulted on extending freedom of information.

The First Minister's statement might also have contained an aspiration to tackle child poverty and early disadvantage, which are the biggest challenges facing Scotland, and have laid out SNP measures for dealing with them. However, apart from a passing reference to the early years

strategy, which has not been developed at all, there was nothing whatever about the issue.

It is somewhat unnerving to see in cold print this sentence in the First Minister's statement:

"We will take forward our manifesto and resist short-cuts or expedient offers that run contrary to it."—[*Official Report*, 14 May 2008; c 8536.]

This SNP Government has been notorious for the way in which it has ditched manifesto promises—not little ones but wholesale buckets of big ones. We saw that again today as the First Minister ducked what were fairly straightforward questions on the funding of the Forth bridge.

The First Minister's statement is like the emperor's new clothes. It will not do. It is time to move Scotland forward, not backward.

16:38

Derek Brownlee (South of Scotland) (Con): I seem to recall that that was the Labour Party's slogan in a recent general election campaign.

The Liberal Democrats have criticised the Government's statement on moving Scotland forward as being vacuous and thin. I am not clear whether that is Opposition rhetoric or an attempt to protect intellectual property rights, but we shall see.

For its part, the Labour Party has decided to complain about a lack of bills. That criticism is certainly apt from a party whose approach to government can be summed up in three words: legislation, legislation, legislation. We on this side of the chamber are not complaining about the lack of Government laws. Our message is simple: don't bring them on.

In defending the lack of legislation, ministers have pointed out that unnecessary laws impose costs on business and the wider community. Indeed, they have been so persuasive on that point that we will do everything we can to stop the local income tax reaching the statute books and to prevent the damage that it will cause. The local income tax plans are in such a mess that even the Liberal Democrats have attacked them in today's press. It is small wonder that illegality appears to be the very least of the problems that confront the policy.

Although we do not criticise the Government for failing to legislate, we criticise it for failing to be ambitious. It is not enough for the Government to congratulate itself simply because it is viewed as doing a better job than its predecessor. If the bar were set any lower, ministers would be in danger of tripping over it.

Some interesting contributions were made in the debate. David McLetchie mentioned the civil war

in America, whereas Malcolm Chisholm steadfastly avoided mentioning the one in the Labour Party. On the theme of the American civil war, Kenny Gibson read out *Scotland on Sunday*, a tactic that Abraham Lincoln would have used at Gettysburg had *Scotland on Sunday* been published at the time. Frank McAveety called for humility from the Government; I sincerely hope that he is not a man who takes disappointment badly.

Murdo Fraser urged the Scottish Government to work constructively with the Westminster Government in the national interest. Robert Brown praised Jeremy Purvis's speech; I cannot praise enough the eloquent and wise remarks that were made by Murdo Fraser. We see no point in urging the UK Government to work constructively with the Scottish Government, given that the UK Government is unable to work constructively even with the UK Government. That is not a problem with which we will be saddled for much longer.

On a positive note, the SNP seems to have recognised over recent weeks the different approach that a Conservative Government will bring. Only last Friday, David Cameron pledged to show the Scottish Government respect. By Tuesday, Joe FitzPatrick had issued a press release in which he condemned the UK Government for a lack of respect. It is nice to see that Joe FitzPatrick is as capable of parroting Conservative lines as he is nationalist ones. I look forward to his colleagues taking a similar approach, as indeed they may have started to do. On PPP, John Swinney has already made the tacit admission that, as someone once said, there is no alternative. It is clear that the Scottish futures trust, whichever of the 14 options the Government proceeds with, is PPP. We do not yet know which relative it is or whether it is a member of the same family, but it will be interesting nonetheless to see how ministers manage to cover up the fact that the Scottish futures trust is private finance, whatever else they choose to describe it as.

Of course, it is no secret that we have found common cause with the Government on some issues over the past year. We will continue to adopt that pragmatic approach, which is aimed at delivering Conservative policies. As other members have said, we welcome the Government's announcement on its drugs policy, which is a very positive move. We also welcome the decisions that it has taken to scrap road tolls, end ring fencing for local government and reshape Scottish Enterprise, all of which it lifted from the Conservative manifesto. Today, we heard encouraging words from Nicola Sturgeon on rural schools. I assume that she, too, lifted what she said from the Conservative manifesto.

We look forward to the Cabinet touring the towns and villages of Scotland over the summer. It

will be interesting to see whether any residents are allowed to sit in on those meetings to listen to the great discussions on how the Government wants to move Scotland forward.

We are happy to give the Government credit where it has done well. We are happy to see that there will be more police and that cuts in business rates for small businesses will be made more quickly. However, the Government has strayed from the manifesto in too many areas and ministers have got into a whole heap of trouble as a result. The Government may have abandoned plans to introduce a £2,000 grant for home buyers but, in view of the additional costs that are about to be put on to home sellers with the single seller survey, it would be well advised to consider the introduction of a £2,000 grant to home sellers to cover the cost.

When I said that ministers have got into trouble where they have strayed from the manifesto, the manifesto to which I was referring was, of course, ours. If the Government wants to move Scotland forward, it should ditch what is left of its own manifesto and pick up what is left to implement in ours.

16:44

Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab): On occasion, the previous Executive was accused by Opposition parties of submitting motions to the Parliament that were self-congratulatory. Although there may have been a small amount of justification for those accusations, the current Scottish Government has taken self-congratulation to new limits. The Government does not only blow its own trumpet, it has an entire brass band honking out an anthem of self praise.

However, if we dampen down the joyful cacophony—it is perhaps a little unkind to refer to Kenneth Gibson and Brian Adam in that way—the melody is not so sweet. The motion trots out a shopping list of proclaimed Government achievements, but many of those claims of success are premature to say the least. For example, it refers to increases in police numbers, but as George Foulkes found out by way of a written parliamentary question, the number of police on the beat in Scotland fell by 45 during the first year of the SNP Government, so now it has to find 1,045 police officers by 2011.

The reduction in rates for small businesses has come into effect. I am sure that it will be popular with those who benefit. The rates bill for my constituency office in Dumfries is significantly reduced. I assure ministers that I will use the additional allowance to the benefit of my constituents. Tax cuts are usually popular with beneficiaries but, after two months, there can be

no evidence of whether that tax cut will lead to the regeneration of Scotland's town centres as the Government has proclaimed it will.

The motion also refers to

“the new partnership with local government”—

more often referred to as the historic concordat—which is much heralded by the Scottish ministers. Local authorities are becoming aware of the cost to them of that concordat, through which they receive the blame if the Government fails to deliver on its promises. Directors of education estimate that the Government's pledge to reduce class sizes in primaries 1 to 3 to only 18 will cost an additional £422 million to implement but, as Frank McAveety pointed out, there has been an abject failure on the part of ministers to address the cost of the pledge. Today, we read that the Government has now messed up the curriculum for excellence, too.

The voluntary sector also feels the squeeze as local authorities struggle to balance the books: £900,000 was cut from the Cyrenians in Aberdeen, £86,000 was cut from Age Concern in the Highlands and £400,000 was cut from the Loch Arthur project in Dumfries and Galloway. Those are facts, not scare stories; we are not scaremongering, as we were accused of doing.

One omission from the motion's roll of honour—although the cabinet secretary referred to it in her speech—is the abolition of the graduate endowment. Is that because the Government is embarrassed at abandoning its promise to ditch student debt? *[Interruption.]* As I said, the cabinet secretary mentioned it in her speech, but it is not in the motion. Or is it omitted, as Murdo Fraser and Frank McAveety pointed out, because one of the unexpected consequences of that inadequate legislation, the Graduate Endowment Abolition (Scotland) Act 2008, is that postgraduates whose repayments had been deferred because they are undertaking another qualification are now receiving demands for repayment, possibly with interest?

I am not saying that there is nothing to be welcomed in the Government's programme: there are several measures that the previous Executive initiated—Malcolm Chisholm referred to one—and others that travel in the same direction. James Kelly welcomed the completion of the M74.

Margo MacDonald: Will Elaine Murray give way?

Elaine Murray: I will give way to Margo MacDonald because I owe her a drink.

Margo MacDonald: On local government finance and the cuts that are being made at local level, does Elaine Murray insist that, had her party

been returned to government, there would have been no cuts?

Elaine Murray: It would have been down to each local authority to decide on its own priorities, but my party would not have imposed a council tax freeze. We would not have threatened to withdraw money from councils if they did not implement a council tax freeze; it would have been encouraged but not imposed.

I will be interested to learn more about the pilot projects in the environment portfolio. I hope that they will be more than just an excuse for the weekly ministerial engagements that the Minister for Environment undertakes in my constituency.

There are also major issues of policy development that are not mentioned in the cheerful motion. As Murdo Fraser asked, what about the Government's much-vaunted local income tax? Not only is it not local, and not only does it take away from councils the ability to make local decisions on revenue, but expert opinion believes that it might not even be legal. Professor Alan Page believes that the proposed tax is likely to be tested in court. Professor Himsforth believes that it is in contravention of article 9.3 of the European Charter of Local Self-Government. Professor Richard Kerley stated that up to 100,000 pensioners could be worse off under the new system.

As other members have asked, what about the Scottish futures trust, the business plan for which the Government tried to sneak out at a conference last week? Having read through the 50-plus pages of mainly meaningless verbiage that the business plan contains, I am not surprised that the Government did not want to draw attention to it. It looks more like a school project than a major policy document. Now that the business plan is out, the Scottish futures trust pleases neither the critics of PPP, who correctly identify it as simply another variant of private finance in the public sector, nor the business community, which is concerned about some of the anti-private sector rhetoric that has accompanied the trust's protracted birth.

The motion mentions food and fuel costs—and, as always, blames Westminster. It is always the big boys that did it and ran away. As Ross Finnie asked, where is the Government's energy strategy? Is it just about turning down wind turbine developments in SNP-held constituencies?

The Government congratulates itself on a list of small, easy, populist measures, but it will be judged on how it deals with major issues of policy: how the finances for Scotland's local authorities are raised; how sufficient funding for infrastructure investment is to be levered in; how a secure energy supply is to be sustained; how to ensure

that our population has the necessary skills, now and in the future, to support sustainable economic growth; and how to promote social justice and support vulnerable people in Scotland's communities. On those issues, the Government fails.

The First Minister might believe that he is the greatest politician that Scotland has ever known and his ministers might be blinded by their own egos but, slowly but surely, the scales are falling from the eyes of the Scottish people. There is no evidence that, after its first year, the Government is moving Scotland in the right direction. On the issues that matter, SNP stands for "still no progress".

16:52

The Minister for Environment (Michael Russell): I find myself in some difficulty, because the opening sentences of my speaking notes say:

"This has been a very valuable and useful debate. I welcome the contributions and views that have been expressed".

I publicly dissociate myself from that opinion. This has not been a "valuable and useful debate." It is of some significance that not one member has declared an interest—because there has been no interest in the debate. Outside the chamber, there will be no interest in the debate. By insisting on holding this debate, Robert Brown has succeeded in wasting everybody's time. Labour members have been very cute—they knew that first of all.

Robert Brown rose—

Michael Russell: No, Mr Brown, do not waste any more of my time. My keynote for this summing-up speech is just to get through it.

At the start of the debate, only three out of 16 Lib Dem members were present. They were not going to have Mr Brown wasting their time. Mr Chisholm did worse—only six out of 41 Labour members were in the chamber for the start of the debate. Even Mr Fraser managed just three out of 16. Those absent members knew that this afternoon's debate was pointless. It was a pointless occasion, and it was one of those occasions that do the Parliament no good whatever. Let us be ruthlessly honest about it: this was political theatre for those who are paid to be here. The debate had no other meaning.

David Whitton: Will the minister give way?

Michael Russell: No, I will not give way. My intention is just to get through this. I just want to get through it and go home. Just understand that, all right? *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Mr McAveety: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Is it appropriate for a minister, in responding to a debate, to say that he is here only "to get through it"?

Michael Russell: Yup.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That is for the chamber to judge.

Michael Russell: It is appropriate for ministers to tell the truth, which is what I intend to do.

Let us consider the record of Labour in opposition when it matters and the issues that it has brought to the Parliament. In the past year, Labour has had 19 debates and of those—this is a fact and facts are chieftains that win a ding—only five contained a policy proposal and one of them was on the Calman commission, which does not count as a policy in any way. That leaves four policy proposals, of which only two were new ideas. Labour in opposition is not moving Scotland forward, it is moving itself backward. There was nothing new in the five Lib Dem debates either—not one new policy was proposed. Even the Tories have a better record than that.

This afternoon, we have heard several dismal speeches that were designed only to carp. I accept that many of them were fairly entertaining, but I want to single out one that was not. I can describe Johann Lamont's speech only as a sour and bitter attack full of smears and false innuendo all shrouded in a cloak of false indignation about parliamentary accountability. What annoys Johann Lamont and so many other Labour members is not that we have failed to be accountable but that the people of Scotland like what we are doing.

I understand the frustration that somebody who has spent their career saying that something cannot be done will feel when they discover not only that it is being done but that it is being done well, but my advice to Johann Lamont and to other Labour members is to get over it and start contributing to the debate. That has been the constant theme of the debate. There can be no criticism of things that are not happening—that is not possible.

Johann Lamont: Will the minister give way?

Michael Russell: No, I will not.

The criticism is of what has been happening—the successes that are taking place and the intention to continue to make things happen. Let me be absolutely clear on the issue of smaller class sizes. I am happy to do so, as it is a policy with which I am proud to be associated.

Bill Butler (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab): Will the minister give way on that point?

Michael Russell: Smaller class sizes are vital to Scotland. We have argued for them constantly.

The concordat with local government creates the framework for their operation.

Bill Butler: Will the minister give way?

Murdo Fraser: Will the minister give way?

Michael Russell: No, Mr Fraser.

Councils and the Government are working hard to achieve that.

Bill Butler *rose*—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order. Mr Butler, sit down.

Michael Russell: No amount of self-serving, head-of-a-pin, pettifogging opposition will stop smaller class sizes in Scotland. That is my message to Jeremy Purvis.

Bill Butler *rose*—

Murdo Fraser *rose*—

Michael Russell: No, I will not give way—I am sorry. I want to finish and I am going to finish.

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): Order. The minister has made it clear that he will not give way.

Lewis Macdonald (Aberdeen Central) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I understand that the standing orders require members to treat one another with courtesy. To launch a personal attack on a member and then refuse an intervention from that member is surely the height of discourtesy.

The Presiding Officer: It is entirely up to the speaker whether they take an intervention. I have only just come into the chair, so I am not aware of any earlier exchanges.

Michael Russell: Presiding Officer—

Margo MacDonald: Will the minister give way?

Michael Russell: No, I am sorry.

The Presiding Officer: Order. The minister has made it clear that he is not giving way.

Michael Russell: Believe me, Presiding Officer, I am showing all the courtesy that I can summon at this stage in the debate.

Some of the criticism has involved accusing the Government of being populist, but the real objection is that we are popular, not populist. The Government's mission is to meet and match the rising ambitions of the people of Scotland and to improve their daily lives. That is a popular ambition and one that we will fulfil. Moreover, people know it. Research that was carried out between May and November showed that trust in the Scottish Government had increased by 20 percentage points in a year, from 51 to 71 per cent, which is

twice the level of public trust that is placed in the Westminster Government.

We have laid out a range of proposals and activities that we will bring forward. The First Minister will set out the full details of our legislative programme in September. As he did two weeks ago, he will mark a visionary course for Scotland—one that is full of detail, that will continue to drive Scotland forward and that will appeal to the Scottish people. The only critics of it will be those who do not understand the thirst and ambition of the Scottish people for change.

Point of Order

17:00

Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I wish to raise a point of order under rules 13.6, 7.3 and 14.1 of standing orders.

You will recall that, this afternoon, at First Minister's questions, the First Minister failed on two separate occasions to confirm whether the Scottish Government had sought legal advice on its policy of withdrawing from the common fisheries policy. He said:

"The circumstance in which Scotland will be able to effect that policy is when Scotland becomes an independent country."

On 27 November 2007, Linda Fabiani, the Minister for Europe, External Affairs and Culture, said in a written reply:

"Scotland's membership of the European Union, currently as part of the United Kingdom, requires it to meet all obligations with relevance to its devolved competences, including the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP)."—[*Official Report, Written Answers*, 27 November 2007; S3W-6214.]

However, in the consultation paper "Safeguarding Our Fishing Rights: The Future of Quota Management and Licensing in Scotland", the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment clearly states:

"The Scottish Government is seeking to withdraw from the CFP."

He did not mean at some vague time in the future, but now—potentially placing this Government in breach of its devolved responsibilities as outlined in the answer given by Linda Fabiani.

It would therefore appear that, in his answer to the chamber, the First Minister may have misled Parliament. Furthermore, either he or his cabinet secretary may be in breach of section 1.1(b) of the ministerial code, which states:

"Ministers have a duty to the Parliament to account, and be held to account, for the policies, decisions and actions taken within their field of responsibility".

You may wish to ask the First Minister to clarify to the chamber whether he is right, or whether his cabinet secretary is the one who is correct.

Furthermore—and perhaps most worrying—in a briefing to the press at lunch time, the First Minister's spokesperson indicated that the First Minister did not answer because it is the Government's policy not to reveal whether legal advice has been sought or given. If that is true, that answer should have been given to this chamber by the First Minister, and not to the press by his spokesperson. However, that is unfortunately not the policy of this SNP

Government. On 7 June 2007, in an emergency statement to Parliament, the First Minister said:

"I consulted the Lord Advocate for advice on the significant legal matters involved yesterday".—[*Official Report*, 7 June 2007; c 588.]

He therefore confirmed that legal advice had been sought and given.

In briefing the press on an answer and not giving that answer to the chamber, the First Minister has been discourteous to the chamber and is again in breach of standing orders.

On 28 February, this Parliament resolved that the Government should

"bring forward a statement to the Parliament"

when the review was concluded. Parliament also resolved that it believed that

"the best way of ensuring independent oversight is for the Parliament to appoint a person independent of government to investigate alleged breaches of the Scottish Ministerial Code."—[*Official Report*, 28 February 2008; c 6538.]

Given that—week in, week out—ministers are holding this Parliament in contempt and failing to answer legitimate questions, it is essential that that statement is brought forward as a matter of urgency. I would therefore urge you to use your good offices to ensure that a statement is brought before Parliament urgently so that Parliament can fulfil its legitimate role in holding this Government to account.

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): First, I thank the member for giving me notice of her point of order.

Karen Gillon has raised two issues. First, she asked whether I wish to ask the First Minister to clarify his position to the chamber. I repeat—I have said this many times before—that it is not the role of the Presiding Officer to establish the veracity of statements made by ministers. It is open to all members, if they feel that ministers have misled the chamber—deliberately or otherwise—to ask them to return to the chamber. It would be expected that they would do so. However, that is a matter for members and not for the Presiding Officers.

Secondly, Karen Gillon asked about the completion of the review of the ministerial code. That is a matter for the Scottish Government, but I am sure that members are aware that the matter has been raised at the Parliamentary Bureau in recent weeks. If the member wishes it to be raised again, I suggest that she discuss the matter with her business manager.

Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind): Further to the point of order, Presiding Officer.

Am I correct in interpreting Karen Gillon's question to the First Minister as being in order, as

she simply asked whether legal advice had been sought?

The Presiding Officer: I am not entirely certain what point of order the member is raising. I repeat that the veracity of members' replies and answers is for them to determine, not for the Presiding Officers to determine. There was nothing wrong with the question, if that is what Ms MacDonald is asking.

Margo MacDonald: With respect, Presiding Officer, I think that the First Minister did not give a yes or no answer.

The Presiding Officer: That is a matter for the First Minister, as I have made clear on many occasions.

Decision Time

17:04

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): There are eight questions to be put as a result of today's business. In relation to the debate on moving Scotland forward, I remind members that if the amendment in the name of Malcolm Chisholm is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Ross Finnie will fall.

The first question is, that amendment S3M-2002.3, in the name of Karen Gillon, which seeks to amend motion S3M-2002, in the name of Richard Lochhead, on the common agricultural policy health check, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S3M-2002.1, in the name of John Scott, which seeks to amend motion S3M-2002, in the name of Richard Lochhead, on the common agricultural policy health check, 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)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)

Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 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)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 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)

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, 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)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)

Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 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 79, Against 2, Abstentions 43.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S3M-2002.2, in the name of Jim Hume, which seeks to amend motion S3M-2002, in the name of Richard Lochhead, on the common agricultural policy health check, 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)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)

Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 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)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 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)

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, 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)

Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 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 79, Against 2, Abstentions 43.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S3M-2002, in the name of Richard Lochhead, on the common agricultural policy health check, 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)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 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)

Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 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)
 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)
 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)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 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)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 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)
 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)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 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)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)

Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 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

Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 122, Against 0, Abstentions 2.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Parliament, noting the European Commission's legislative proposals for the health check of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) reform, welcomes the Scottish Government's commitment to consult on these proposals, and on the longer-term implementation of CAP in Scotland, in order that agriculture remains a dynamic and competitive industry playing its full part in ensuring the long-term viability of our rural communities and enabling farmers to play their part in achieving the Scottish Government's purpose of sustainable economic growth through food production, high standards of animal welfare and the environmental management of our agricultural land but, in so doing, notes the importance of consulting on the potential impact of progressive modulation on Scottish farms and affirms that any increases in European Union-wide modulation should be matched by a corresponding deduction in levels of voluntary modulation; considers that any increase in compulsory modulation must be offset by a corresponding reduction in voluntary modulation to ensure that Scottish producers are not put at a competitive disadvantage within the European Union; further considers that Scotland, with its high proportion of large farm units, must not be disadvantaged by proposals for progressive modulation or capping; believes that, in light of rapidly escalating food and fuel costs, the Scottish Rural Development Programme should be reviewed, with the production of food and food security considered as a key priority, and recognises the correlation between economic activity on the ground and delivery of environmental benefits for all.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S3M-2001.2.1, in the name of Murdo Fraser, which seeks to amend amendment S3M-2001.2, in the name of Malcolm Chisholm, on moving Scotland forward, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)

Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

AGAINST

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Ahmad, Bashir (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)
 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)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 74, Against 48, Abstentions 1.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S3M-2001.2, in the name of Malcolm Chisholm, as amended, which seeks to amend motion S3M-2001, in the name of Nicola Sturgeon, on moving Scotland forward, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

AGAINST

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Ahmad, Bashir (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)

Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)
 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)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (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)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (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)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 58, Against 48, Abstentions 17.

Amendment, as amended, agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The amendment in the name of Ross Finnie is pre-empted.

The final question is, that motion S3M-2001, in the name of Nicola Sturgeon, on moving Scotland forward, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)

Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

AGAINST

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Ahmad, Bashir (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)
 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)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 75, No 49, Abstentions 0.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Parliament condemns the self-congratulation and lack of positive policies for the future in the First Minister's statement on Moving Scotland Forward on 14 May 2008; recognises the many SNP broken promises on a whole range of manifesto commitments, from dumping student debt to providing a £2,000 grant to first-time buyers; calls on the Scottish Government to bring forward substantive policies to address climate change, skills development, affordable housing shortages, health inequalities and the other big challenges that confront Scotland, and further calls on the Scottish Government to work constructively with Her Majesty's Government on these and other issues for the benefit of the Scottish people, thus demonstrating the benefits of our historic union with England, Wales and Northern Ireland, a union which continues to attract overwhelming public support.

“‘No Recourse’ No Safety”

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): The final item of business today is a members' business debate on motion S3M-1626, in the name of Angela Constance, on “‘No Recourse’ No Safety”. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament notes the publication of *No Recourse No Safety: The Government's Failure to Protect Women from Violence*, a report by Amnesty International and the Southall Black Sisters; is disturbed by the evidence that not having recourse to public funds prevents women with insecure immigration status from accessing the benefits they need to claim refuge, effectively trapping women in violence or destitution; welcomes the Scottish Government's ongoing commitment to tackling violence against women, continuing the good work commenced by the previous Scottish administration; acknowledges the pivotal contribution of local services such as the West Lothian Council Domestic Abuse Service which provides a service to women from a minority population; notes that not having recourse to public funds affects women who have valid visas as spouses, students, visitors and workers and those who are classed as “overstayers” in addition to victims of trafficking; acknowledges that organisations such as West Lothian Women's Aid are accommodating and assisting women with no recourse to public funds, and commends the recommendations of *No Recourse No Safety*, in particular the need for the Scottish Government to put in place emergency funding while a permanent solution from the UK Government is sought, namely exempting women fleeing violence from the no recourse to public funds requirement.

17:13

Angela Constance (Livingston) (SNP): In a former life, in a former career, I had a client who was serving a life sentence for the violent murder of his wife, an offence that occurred some decades ago now. I will always remember reading the note of circumstance, which described how that young woman attended the social work department with marks on her neck only 10 days before her death, stating that her husband had tried to throttle her. The system and society—the collective “we”—turned its back on that young woman, and she paid with her life.

I extend a warm welcome to the representatives from Scottish Women's Aid, West Lothian Women's Aid and Amnesty International who are in the public gallery today. Due to their vocation and dedication, and the work that is undertaken by government at all levels, both past and present, in regard to domestic violence, I am somewhat confident that in today's Scotland, more women are safer.

However, we are turning our backs on a group of women whom I would describe as new Scots or new Scotswomen. Unless we can navigate or cut our way through the demarcation of devolved and

reserved matters, we will continue to fail—perilously—to protect new Scotswomen who are fleeing violence.

Amnesty International and the Southall Black Sisters have produced deeply disturbing evidence that women with insecure immigration status have no recourse to public funds and are, therefore, unable to claim the benefits that they need to flee violence. They have no right to be accommodated under housing legislation and no housing benefit or supporting people money to pay for refuge and support. They have no right to benefits, yet some of the women have no right to work. Women who flee violence often leave with nothing, and women with no recourse to public funds face the stark and cruel choice of either remaining trapped in a violent relationship or entering destitution.

Who are the women with insecure or uncertain immigration status? They are women with valid visas who are here legally as spouses, students, visitors, workers and those who are classified as overstayers, in addition to those who are the victims of human trafficking. Scottish Women's Aid does its level best, but how can it absorb a cost for which it is not funded—a cost in excess of £6,000 per woman per year—with no recourse to public funds? It is simply not acceptable or sustainable for women to have to rely on charitable donations or sheer good will for the accommodation and support that ensures their safety.

Scottish Women's Aid has highlighted the fact that 106 women throughout Scotland have been refused refuge in the past year. In today's Scotland, any woman should be able to access refuge irrespective of her race, ethnicity or origins. To deny that is, in my view, an abrogation of human rights as well as of human dignity. Many of the women have children and Scottish Women's Aid informs us that an increasing number of local authorities are suggesting that they can accommodate the child but not the mother. That may represent the reality of the legal position, but it is, nonetheless, absolutely outrageous and contrary to the wellbeing of children and the spirit of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995.

There are many challenges for women who are trying to navigate their way through the immigration process. It is costing one West Lothian woman in excess of £700 to apply to the Home Office, and an application can take between three months and two years. Then, there is the need to obtain evidence from a doctor who has documented injuries that are attributable to domestic violence, yet as we know some offenders are very careful and leave only mental scars.

Scottish Women's Aid and Amnesty International are campaigning for the Scottish Government to put in place emergency funds

while a permanent solution from the UK Government is sought—that is, the exemption of women who are fleeing domestic violence from the rule that currently denies them recourse to public funds. Other countries, such as Canada, the United States of America and Austria, have similar rules that deny recourse to public funds, but those rules specify exemptions.

The crux of the issue is reserved to Westminster. As a nationalist, I regret that fact. I hope that the Scottish Government will lead the way in finding a solution and co-operate constructively with—and, when appropriate, cajole—Westminster, just as it is my duty as an MSP both to co-operate with and, at times, to cajole the Scottish Government in the interests of my constituents, whether they be indigenous or new Scots.

Scottish Women's Aid first raised the issue five years ago and, with more new Scots coming to Scotland—indeed, to my constituency—we need action now. Surely, the safety of women and children is paramount.

17:19

Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab): I thank Angela Constance for bringing this important debate to the chamber. I am sorry that not more members have bothered to stay and listen to the debate. I also thank Amnesty International and Southall Black Sisters for producing the report that spurred the debate, as well as West Lothian Council's domestic abuse services and all others who provide services to women who are victims of domestic abuse.

I am pleased that the Scottish Government is maintaining the previous Scottish Executive's high level of commitment and that it has established a short-life working group on the issue. As the convener of the cross-party group on men's violence against women and children, I am aware of the advances that have been made in raising awareness of violence against women. However, I am equally aware of the gaps in provision. Much more needs to be done to protect women and children and to prevent violence and abuse. I invite those who are taking part in tonight's debate to get involved in the cross-party group, if they are not already involved. It is a valuable link between MSPs and a range of organisations that work to tackle violence against women and children.

The motion highlights a gap that affects women who have insecure immigration status. As we have heard, many of them are here legally on temporary work or study visas, the conditions of which exclude them from many of our welfare benefit systems. They include women whose spouses or long-term partners are British nationals or

residents. Although such women can apply to stay in the United Kingdom permanently if their relationship breaks down, it might be impossible to take the first steps towards that if they are not guaranteed access to safe accommodation and refuge. Applying for leave to remain in the event of domestic abuse can take months or years. Any support that does not acknowledge that will be inadequate.

A small number of local authorities provide funding under the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 for basic living expenses for children. The payments vary and provide an inconsistent and patchy service across Scotland. When funding was requested in one recent case, the local authority suggested that the child might be placed with the abusive partner. In other cases, local authorities have said that they would take children into care to discharge their obligations to the children rather than provide assistance to mothers and children. It is unacceptable that women should be trapped in an abusive relationship because they cannot get support to escape.

That raises the question of human rights and discrimination, with the Government being accused of failing to act with due diligence to protect women's rights. We need to create a way out of the no-recourse trap by excluding from the rule those who are fleeing abusive relationships, at least in the short term until the rule can be amended by special provision so that such women can access refuge and support.

We need to put pressure on Westminster to reconsider its position. We will be joined in this campaign by others throughout the UK. However, the Scottish Government should provide funding to groups that provide refuge and other help to women who are affected by the no-recourse rule, and I call on it to do so.

17:22

Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP): I, too, congratulate Angela Constance on securing the debate, which seeks to address a serious and pressing issue that affects many women and children who are already suffering abuse in what, in some cases, can only be called modern-day slavery. I thank Amnesty International for its report, which I wish that everyone would read; it is harrowing reading. I also thank the women's aid groups who are vociferous in pushing this issue forward.

I raised the issue with the First Minister on 6 March and I received a letter from him. I do not want to put the minister on the spot, but I know that the short-life working group met on 27 May, so could we have an update on what was said at that meeting? It is important that we have that.

Like everyone else here, I cannot express how angry I am about the treatment that these women and children have to go through. It is inhuman and wrong that they are not protected and helped just because the Home Office labels them as having insecure status. They are human beings the same as us and they deserve to be treated the same as we are treated. They live and work in our communities and should be afforded exactly the same access to services as everyone else who lives and works here. To deny them that basic human right is to go back to the days when women were treated as chattels.

The situation reinforces the question, what other gender would be treated in this way? Amnesty International succinctly said that these women are being treated as "Second class human beings." That would not be allowed to happen to any other gender, and we have to make sure that we get that across.

As Angela Constance and others have said, women come here with visas, some are students, some, unfortunately, are trafficked and some come on a spouse's visa. They think that they are coming here to have a life and contribute to this society, but inhuman Westminster legislation treats them as if they are chattels and slaves. As Angela Constance mentioned, countries such as Canada, America and Austria provide such women with help on certain aspects, albeit that in some cases they are allowed only a three-month stay in accommodation. In Canada, such women are given status after they have produced various documents. If other countries can do that, why can we not?

Basically, the Westminster Government is going against international law by failing to uphold the human rights of such women and children. I know that the issue is reserved to Westminster, but that never prevented us from considering Westminster issues such as refugee status. Many of us in the chamber today, including Johann Lamont and others, worked together to ensure that we got rid of some of the horrendous circumstances that applied to refugees, such as the voucher system. We pushed for those changes and we achieved a victory. Through pushing the issue together, we in the Scottish Parliament could secure a victory. We need to ensure that the Westminster Government realises that it is culpable if it does not uphold international law by protecting the women.

As Angela Constance said in her speech and in her motion, the Scottish Parliament should provide some form of emergency funding. We can no longer tolerate the fact that women and children in our midst are being treated as second-class citizens like back in the 18th century. I congratulate Angela Constance on her motion, which I support.

17:26

Ted Brocklebank (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I, too, congratulate Angela Constance on lodging the motion, which is an important and timely contribution to what is likely to become a far wider debate.

Clearly, domestic abuse is a blight on any civilised society. That is all the more so when those abused, whether they be women, children or young people, have no access to public funds to help them to escape the place where they are being abused—usually the family home—or to find alternative accommodation. As we have heard, those with no recourse to public funds are usually women who, because of their insecure immigration status, are not entitled to welfare benefits or to temporary or permanent local authority housing.

In its recent report “‘No Recourse’ No Safety”, Amnesty International put the matter more boldly:

“it is a shocking fact that in the UK some women in desperate need of safety cannot access basic levels of protection and support”.

The report claims that abusers will often use their spouses’ insecure immigration status as a way of perpetuating their vulnerability and dependency. What makes that plight worse is that, in many cultures, women cannot flee the violence in their homes because their families would disown or ostracise them when they returned to their native countries.

The British Nationality Act 1981 was intended to prevent people from abroad from being able to enter the UK and stay here permanently through marriage. The act contained a provision preventing asylum seekers who did not stay in their marriage for at least a year—subsequently increased to two years—from having recourse to public funds. The act requires that such persons must be supported financially by their spouses or support themselves by working. However well intentioned that provision might have been—one can see the Government’s logic in trying to prevent immigration by marriages of convenience or otherwise—for many women the act has become a trap whereby abusive spouses prey on their vulnerability and dependence.

To Scotland’s credit, Oxfam’s report “Fair Play: Refugees and asylum seekers in Scotland” states:

“there is greater tolerance to asylum seekers in Scotland compared to England and Wales ... Glasgow now houses the most asylum seekers of all cities in the UK. Currently, over 5,500 people living in BIA contracted accommodation in Glasgow that equates to around 10% of the UK asylum-seeking population.”

However, according to Scottish Women’s Aid, a recent survey showed that 176 women in Scotland with no recourse to public funds had sought

support from women’s aid groups during the previous year. Around 80 per cent of those sought accommodation, but only 24 per cent of them were fortunate enough to find support. As Angela Constance and others have pointed out, the local aid groups simply did not have the money to do more.

I pay tribute to those women’s aid groups, such as the one in Cupar in the part of Scotland that I represent. East Fife Women’s Aid was established by volunteers in 1996. Last year, its services were used by 163 people, including many from ethnic backgrounds—there was no discrimination. The group is funded by Fife Council and the Scottish Government as well as by charitable donations, but Government funding is not allocated for refuge accommodation and living expenses for women who have no way of accessing public funds. As we have heard, it is true that some local authorities provide basic funding for living expenses for children. However, separating children from their mothers is clearly never in their best interests.

I accept and understand that one of the major difficulties that are facing the Government is that immigration and welfare benefits are reserved powers. However, as we have heard, West Lothian Council and other local authorities are finding ways of tackling the problem. It is important that that becomes the norm throughout Scotland.

As we have heard, Scotland has aid centres specifically for black and minority ethnic groups—one in Glasgow and another in Edinburgh—and I welcome their involvement in the short-life working group that was set up by the Government to seek sustainable solutions to the problems. Like Sandra White, I look forward to the minister giving details of the evidence that was led.

It is perfectly legitimate for the Scottish Government, in line with the Scottish Women’s Aid recommendations, to bring to bear whatever pressure it can on the UK Government to make the necessary changes to the immigration and welfare benefits system to provide support for women, children and young people who are currently being denied access to these essential and potentially life-saving services.

17:30

Gil Paterson (West of Scotland) (SNP): There is a clear need for services to deal with women and children who are systematically abused, with many designations attached to their status, such as legal, illegal or trafficked. I agree with everything that I have heard so far, but I want in my limited time to concentrate on those who have been trafficked, although most—if not all—that I have to say will have a direct bearing on all designations.

Amnesty International rightly makes great play of human rights law. I would go further, however, and say that we have a moral responsibility to come to the assistance of women, some of them mere children, who have been trafficked, imprisoned, brutally treated and forced to prostitute themselves while our systems—or lack of systems—keep them as slaves to the traffickers because they fear the worst when they think of what is outside where they are. The women's handlers use the tactic of fear. They ingrain a message into the individual's soul: "If you think the situation's bad now, I can tell you how bad it can be outside, not only for you but for your loved ones elsewhere." Even with considerable assistance and understanding, people in that situation are reluctant to accept that they will be supported if they break out of their imprisonment. Therefore, we must try in every way possible to reach trafficked people. The last thing we should do is send the message that we are not ready or willing to come to their assistance, never mind to their rescue.

We need to take action: we need to have a fully integrated approach to people who have been trafficked, from identification of the whereabouts of trafficked women to reaching out to them with crucial expert support. The status of "illegal" needs to be removed and there must be sympathetic counselling. Of course, none of that will be possible if safe houses are not available. None of it is easy or cheap, but it is achievable.

I know that most of the authority in the matter lies with Westminster, which the non-governmental organisations fully appreciate. However, when the Scottish Parliament debates and gets behind issues of concern, positive action normally follows. If there was ever a subject in relation to which there was a need for positive action and a united front to meet dire human need, this is that subject.

I am pleased that Angela Constance has brought the matter for debate—in doing so, she has done Parliament a great service. I hope that Parliament and the Government speak and act as one. There must be swift action.

17:34

Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): I congratulate Angela Constance on securing a debate on this critical issue.

A couple of months ago, I had the privilege of holding the launch of the "No Recourse No Safety" report in the Scottish Parliament. A significant number of MSPs here now, and others, attended to hear at first hand about experiences of the problems that are faced by women in such circumstances, and by the groups that are trying to

support them. They also heard how women are caught up in the situations that lead to the dire straits that have been described.

I commend Amnesty International, Southall Black Sisters, Scottish Women's Aid and all the women's organisations, which can as ever teach us all a lesson or two in how to bring an issue to public attention and demand that action be taken.

I welcomed and appreciated in Angela Constance's speech and motion the recognition of the previous Executive's work on the matter. The whole Parliament has ownership of that work, because it was shaped by the Parliament. The reality of that work is that change has emerged because over many years, women across all sorts of divides in the United Kingdom and far beyond have redefined what politics is about, so that issues of violence against women have become a matter for Governments and for political action.

We should not forget the need to challenge male behaviour and male attitudes and to hold men to account. While we raise such issues, I hope that the minister will reassure us that he will consider closely the report of the Women's Support Project on the attitudes of men who use prostitutes and the connections between those attitudes, male violence and trafficking. Those men can carry in their heads the notion that although those women might have been trafficked, using them is legitimate. That report is important and reflects on the context of the problems that we experience.

We must recognise the courage of survivors who have spoken out against male violence in all its forms and who have exposed not only their individual experience, but the pattern of the problem, which Government action at every level must address.

It is clear that the Government alone cannot at every level deliver justice and equality for women, or address issues of violence against women. It is important to give a voice to those who are most vulnerable and to those who understand the need for action and want to shape the action of government at every level. It is right that the organisations that have emerged to meet the challenge of violence against women have been, and—I am glad to say—continue to be, at the centre of government action. By talking to those who really understand the situation, we will take the correct action.

Issues of violence against women provide as powerful an example as any of the challenge to the Government to shape policy not from the top down, but through the experience of individuals and through groups. I am grateful that the Executive has continued that approach.

I welcome the minister's decision to establish a short-life working group to address the questions.

Like everybody here, he has resisted the temptation to transplant the discussion into a debate about powers. He has recognised that powers are shared and that responsibility for making progress is also shared. I commend him for what he has done and I welcome and look forward to a report. I assure him that Labour members will do everything they can, as I am sure all members will, to secure support for action to meet and address need and to challenge the problems that are highlighted effectively in “No Recourse’ No Safety” and by the organisations that have been mentioned.

17:38

The Minister for Communities and Sport (Stewart Maxwell): Like other members, I congratulate Angela Constance on securing the debate. I also congratulate all the members who have spoken in the debate, which has been interesting and filled with emotion and detailed information about what many unfortunate women in our country face.

I am glad to have the opportunity to wind up for the Government. I reiterate my commitment and that of the Government to tackling violence against women. We take seriously the issues that have been raised, which are complex, as they straddle reserved and devolved powers. Immigration law is a matter for Westminster, and the Home Office is actively considering whether to fast-track immigration applications by people who have no recourse to public funds.

In March, the Home Secretary, Jacqui Smith, and Vernon Coaker, an undersecretary at the Home Office, announced a new scheme under which victims of domestic abuse who have no recourse to public funds might be eligible to receive support for their housing and living costs. The new scheme will strengthen how domestic abuse cases are considered and enable vulnerable victims to access additional support. Under the proposals, which are still being developed, victims of domestic abuse whose applications for indefinite leave to remain were successful might qualify for a contribution to their costs.

The Home Office will also work with the UK Border Agency to develop a service level agreement to enable initial applications for indefinite leave to remain to be processed in 20 working days—such applications can currently take several months. That will greatly reduce the financial burden on agencies that support women in that situation. Guidance will be developed to assist voluntary organisations to ensure that the applications that they support have all the necessary detail, which will allow applications to be processed without delay. I also understand that

the Home Office will work with the UK Border Agency to look again at the criteria for assessing destitution to ensure that a robust process is in place to implement the destitution rule, which allows for the current £750 application fee to be waived.

Most of that work will have implications at a UK-wide level, and will move towards alleviating the workload and stress involved in processing the applications. It is important that the issues are progressed as soon as is practicable. I am pleased to tell members that we have been advised by the UK Government that the scheme will be in place by this autumn.

Obviously, to the extent that matters are within Westminster’s remit, our hands are tied, but I pledge that I will write to the UK Government to set out our concerns and those that were expressed by members during the debate and to reiterate our desire to find a way forward as soon as is possible and practicable.

The Scottish Government is progressing matters, too. As members have said, earlier this year we established a short-life working group to examine the possible options to help women who have no recourse to public funds. Scottish Women’s Aid, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, Shakti Women’s Aid and Hemat Gryffe Women’s Aid are among the group’s members, in addition to officials from the Scottish Government’s violence against women team and homelessness team. Its first meeting took place in February and, as Sandra White said, it met for the second time two days ago.

We are all aware that the issues are difficult, and the group is currently working to establish what information and data it needs to consider possible workable options on the way forward. The group is, of course, aware of the report by Amnesty International and the Southall Black Sisters, which provides a useful context for its considerations; it also has regard to the role of the UK Government and its emerging proposals.

I await the group’s report, which I expect later this year, and I assure Parliament that I will take its findings seriously and will consider what practical and sustainable measures we can take to ensure that this particularly vulnerable group of people are treated appropriately. In the meantime, my officials will continue to liaise with their counterparts in the Home Office and to ensure that we are fully aware of the progress that is being made south of the border as far as reserved matters are concerned. As I said, I will write to the undersecretary at the Home Office, Vernon Coaker.

It might also be helpful for views on this area to be fed into the national conversation. I do not seek

to make a party-political point, but we clearly need a full exploration of the devolved and reserved aspects of the issue, and there must be clarity over the limitations of what we in the Scottish Government can progress. I encourage all those involved and those with concerns about people who have no recourse to public funds to participate in that discussion.

What we can and will do is continue to support the work of organisations that address the full range of violence against women issues—I include in that the support that is given to Scottish Women's Aid and the network of local groups. In addition, five projects that are currently funded from the violence against women funding stream are working on the issues around women with no recourse to public funds in the context of wider issues of violence and its impacts on women from black and minority ethnic communities.

Obviously, it is of deep concern if Women's Aid or other groups are struggling financially, for whatever reason. If there are ways in which we can help, we will of course consider those fully, but we have to be realistic about what we can do pending further progress at a UK Government level.

I will cover some of the many issues that members raised in the debate. I share the concern that Cathy Peattie expressed about children being taken into care or given to an abusive partner. The fundamental point is that the best interests of children must be paramount. If she has details of the case that she mentioned, I would be more than happy for her to write to me about it. I will take up the issue as appropriate, but I will definitely look into it, because I share her concerns.

Sandra White asked for an update on the working group meeting. It considered the responses to the Scottish Women's Aid survey of prevalence, which was undertaken with all women's aid groups. It agreed a timescale of September 2008 for the first draft of the working group's report, which will include recommendations. It also discussed difficulties faced by individual local authorities. The next meeting will take place in September 2008.

I agree with Gil Paterson's comments about trafficking. For his information and that of other members, the UK Government aims to ratify the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings during 2008. I hope that we can all welcome that, because, frankly, it is overdue. I am pleased that the UK Government has taken that step.

Johann Lamont raised several issues. To sum up, she said that the matter is above party politics and that both the previous Executive and the SNP Government have considered it. Of course, I

absolutely agree with her comments on trafficking, prostitution and male violence against women, and I thank her for her constructive comments on the short-life working group that has been established.

The issue affects all the parties that are represented in the chamber and all members, whether they are male or female and no matter what their background is.

I thank members for taking part in the debate, which has been constructive. There is a degree of consensus and a shared desire to find a way around the existing obstacles and to help the women in question. I assure members that I will reflect fully on the debate and on what can be done to ensure that we provide help.

Meeting closed at 17:45.

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