

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Thursday 5 June 2008

Session 3

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Scottish Parliament

Thursday 5 June 2008

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

Remote and Rural Health Care

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): Good morning. The first item of business is a debate on motion S3M-2056, in the name of Nicola Sturgeon, on remote and rural health care.

I remind members that all speeches should be made through the chair, by which I mean that members should refer to other members by their preferred name or title.

09:15

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon): I am happy to open yet another health debate. I suspect that there are members here this morning who have not been home since last night's member's business debate. That said, this debate is extremely important.

At the outset, I want to re-emphasise this Government's belief that everyone in Scotland should enjoy equal access to the national health service no matter where they live, and that that access should be provided as locally as possible. As we all know, many things need to be done to turn that principle into reality. This debate gives us an opportunity to reflect on what those things are, and on the changing nature and increasing complexity of health care in Scotland; to consider the challenges that are inherent in delivering health care in our more remote areas; and to suggest how best to enhance the accessibility of services in order to deliver further improvements to the health and wellbeing of people who live and work in remote and rural areas.

We all recognise that although the health care needs of rural and urban communities are very similar, there are substantial differences in the way care needs to be delivered. The Government recognises—as, indeed, did the previous Administration—that a one-size-fits-all approach cannot and will not meet the challenges of providing health care in remote and rural areas now or in the future.

That is why I was so pleased to endorse the recommendations of the remote and rural steering group, which was charged with identifying a strategy for sustainable health care in remote and rural Scotland. It delivered its final report to me late last year. I record my thanks to the group for

its excellent work and the comprehensive report that it has submitted. The report undoubtedly provides us, perhaps for the first time, with a clear blueprint for the future—a blueprint that will enable more care to be delivered locally to more people and which will, if implemented, secure the future of all our rural general hospitals. After so many years of uncertainty, I know that that will be particularly welcome news for the people who live in our rural communities.

As the group now gets to work on implementing its recommendations over the coming months and years—which, of course, is always the hard, but most important, part of the process—I expect to see developments that will maximise the contribution of each and every member of the health and social care team and encourage further integration through models of care in which the majority of services are provided locally with only a small number of cases requiring onward referral.

I also expect to see e-health solutions—which are already making a big difference to the way in which health care is delivered in rural communities—become an ever more central part of the delivery model. All that means that we will be able to reduce the need for individuals in such communities to travel to access services that their urban neighbours are likely to have on their doorsteps.

As I said, there should be no one-size-fits-all approach. We must all accept that services that are offered locally will vary. That said, those services will include, as a minimum, a range of out-patient clinics, day-case treatment, midwifery services, palliative care and support for people with long-term conditions and mental health problems. Emergencies and minor injuries will also be treated locally, wherever possible.

Our six rural general hospitals will also deliver, as a minimum, a core range of services. Standard protocols for procedures and transfers should be established and formal links with other centres will be established. Rural general hospitals will act as health care hubs and will be staffed by doctors, nurses and other professionals who have the general and specialist skills that are appropriate to the needs of the communities that they serve. They will be equipped to resuscitate, stabilise and prepare patients for emergency surgery where appropriate. They will also provide access to diagnostics and offer a range of in-patient, out-patient and rehabilitation services, which means that more people will be able to access the services that they need much closer to their homes. In addition, by working closely with hospital staff and other specialist centres, the extended community care teams will help to manage locally patients who have more complicated conditions and who cannot be cared for at home.

Of course, all our efforts are aimed at providing better quality care that is patient centred, safe, effective, efficient, equitable and timely. All that must, of course, be underpinned by procedures that ensure patient safety. That is why we have taken the decision to extend, from this month, the innovative emergency medical retrieval service pilot to cover the whole of the west coast of Scotland. The pilot aims to upskill rural practitioners and to provide rapid access to emergency medical advice, including—crucially—the ability to transfer a consultant with critical care skills to the patient, whatever their location. For patients with life-threatening injuries and illnesses in remote and rural hospitals, the service also provides consultant-based, on-site resuscitation and safer transfer.

As well as attending to patients in person, the consultants who work for the service will provide 24-hour online and telephone advice to any health care professional in the rural area. The service not only provides increased support for rural practitioners; it has already been shown to improve survival rates and outcomes for seriously ill or injured patients whom the service has attended. I am delighted that the extended pilot, which covers five health boards, has commenced. I am also delighted to note that the service anticipates attending 160 to 200 patients and providing advice for another 120 to 150 during the 18-month trial.

I am also delighted that NHS Education for Scotland has established the remote and rural health care educational alliance—RRHEAL—to meet the specific educational needs of the staff who provide health care services in remote and rural areas throughout the country. RRHEAL is an integral part of the remote and rural implementation plan. It will develop and co-ordinate new educational solutions to ensure that the staff who work in those areas can access appropriate education and training opportunities.

Since implementation began in January, RRHEAL has started work in co-operation with NHS boards, education providers, communications and technology services, health care staff and other stakeholders to provide a practical remote and rural focus around learner access, content and support. Initial work has focused on mental health, long-term conditions, health improvement, dentistry and front-line leadership. I hope that, in time, the list will expand as needs arise.

Within the implementation plan, RRHEAL has been tasked specifically with taking forward or supporting key actions around the development of pre-hospital psychiatric emergency care courses, locally delivered educational and training packages for paediatric teams, accessible training

programmes to fill skills gaps in the nursing workforce within rural general hospitals, and education programmes to support emerging roles in respect of allied health care professionals with special interests. I refer to flexible radiography teams, multi-skilled generalist biomedical scientists and generic support workers.

In all that, RRHEAL will work closely with NHS boards, regional planning groups and education providers. It will do so to ensure that educational responses genuinely meet the speed of change in remote and rural services, to ensure that identified learning needs are used collectively to establish a critical mass of learners to give educational providers a sound basis on which to make viable investment decisions, and to ensure—crucially—that learning is properly accredited, wherever possible.

As specific programmes are developed, RRHEAL will have a fundamental role in remote and rural proofing of education and training provision, and in evaluating its impact on remote and rural health services. No member—certainly not those who represent remote or rural constituencies—will underestimate the size of the task that RRHEAL has been given. However, the task is crucial and vital. I am confident that the team will, in working alongside partner organisations—which is an important element in all this—respond well to the challenges that it has been set.

I would like to say a word about the amendments that have been lodged to today's motion, and also to say a word about the NHS Scotland national resource allocation committee, which many members will refer to in their speeches.

I am happy to accept the Conservative amendment. As I said in my statement yesterday, I recognise the importance of the ambulance service in rural communities, which is why I will by the end of this month receive from the service an action plan detailing how it intends to eliminate rostered single manning of ambulances that should be double crewed.

Although aspects of the Labour amendment have merit, I am afraid that I cannot accept it, although I know that that will come as no huge surprise to Margaret Curran and her colleagues. The amendment attacks the recommendations of NRAC—which is something that Labour MSPs from Grampian, Forth Valley, Fife, Lothian and Lanarkshire might find very difficult to explain to their constituents. The Labour amendment makes criticisms, as it has every right to do, but its key weakness is that it does not offer an alternative. It fails to recognise that NRAC—an independent group that was set up by the previous Administration—is about securing, as far as is

possible, fair funding allocations that take into account the real costs of delivering health care. It also fails to recognise that I have made it clear repeatedly that NRAC's recommendations will be implemented on a phased basis, and that no health board in Scotland will lose any funding. It is irresponsible for any member of this Parliament to suggest otherwise.

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): I have heard that mantra on many occasions. It is, however, disingenuous. Although the baseline grant has not been affected for this year, boards such as Borders NHS Board—which has benefited from an Arbutnott uplift in previous years—will not benefit from the new NRAC proposals. Borders NHS Board has received no uplift this year. The baseline has not been cut, but there is no additional resource. That means that there are cuts in the budgets of front-line services.

Nicola Sturgeon: Jeremy Purvis came in right on cue when I was talking about irresponsible members. What I said is not a mantra; it happens to be the truth. No health board will lose funding. Increases—I repeat: increases—will be tailored to ensure that we move towards NRAC shares. That is exactly what happened under Arbutnott, and it is fair to all health boards—in particular, to health boards that currently receive below what is considered to be a fair share. All members have a duty to engage properly in this debate, rather than to scaremonger.

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

Nicola Sturgeon: No—I have to move on and discuss the Liberal Democrat amendment. The amendment is sensible, because a funding formula should not be static. It should be kept under review and should be continually refined. There should be a mechanism for genuine concerns to be addressed—I have had a long discussion with Jeremy Purvis about some of them—which is why the Scottish Government has accepted the NRAC recommendation to establish a standing committee that will be charged with development of the formula.

I am happy to confirm to Jeremy Purvis and others that issues that are raised will be kept under review. That will ensure that the purpose of NRAC and of any funding formula is to deliver fair allocations to health boards. I therefore confirm that I am happy to accept the Liberal Democrat amendment.

I am sure that members look forward, as I do, to the tangible impacts and positive outcomes of the innovative and challenging programme of work that we have set out in "Delivering for Remote and Rural Healthcare". It is a programme that seeks to

deliver better health and better care for the one in five of us who lives in a remote and rural community. I hope that we will have a lively discussion this morning, but I hope that all members will ultimately feel able to support that excellent report.

I move,

That the Parliament commends the work of the Remote and Rural Steering Group and recognises that its report, *Delivering for Remote and Rural Healthcare*, forms the basis of a safe and sustainable service for remote and rural areas that will increase community resilience and guarantee the future of Scotland's rural general hospitals; notes the extension of the Emergency Medical Retrieval Service pilot, providing consultant-led resuscitation and transfer of patients with life-threatening injuries or illness in remote and rural hospitals in the west of Scotland, which commenced on 2 June 2008, and further notes the work of the Remote and Rural Healthcare Education Alliance in providing a co-ordinated approach to the development of remote and rural health education programmes across Scotland to ensure that Scotland's healthcare professionals can provide, and their patients can benefit from, the best possible healthcare, as locally as possible.

09:29

Margaret Curran (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab):

On what I hope is a consensual note, I begin by saying that Labour feels that this is certainly a welcome debate on an important issue. Health care in remote and rural areas is, of course, an important part of health care in Scotland and any debate on our health services must take that vital element into account.

We, too, welcome the analysis and findings of the steering group's report. It represents a key step forward in the delivery of services. I associate myself with the cabinet secretary's thanks to the group for its work and for the substance of the report.

I would like to say a little about the broader context, in order to remind members of the issues with which we are grappling and of the world in which we find ourselves. While preparing for the debate and familiarising myself with the fundamental issues that affect health care in remote and rural areas, I have been doing a bit of reading. I was struck by comments that were made by Dr James Douglas, who is a general practitioner from Fort William. He recently wrote:

"The health of rural people remains a global challenge for the developed and developing world. In many poor countries, access to clean water and food by rural populations remains a basic challenge to health. While HIV, TB, Malaria, road trauma and warfare challenge rural health in developing countries, developed countries are challenged by equity of access to sophisticated healthcare."

That equity of access to sophisticated health care is undoubtedly what we will focus on this morning. Our discussions will cover issues of extreme need and, at times, extreme poverty. However, it is

worth putting our debate in context and keeping in mind the broader considerations.

As I have said, the final report of the steering group is welcome; it sets the agenda for the Parliament's discussions of health care in remote and rural areas. However, in the article that I just quoted, Dr Douglas says that much of today's work in health care in remote and rural areas is based on the principles that were set out in the Dewar report of 1912. As the article says:

"Dewar's principal recommendations included better training for rural doctors, better use of transport and technology, and guaranteed minimal levels of service provision for rural populations, despite geography."

The aim was to overcome the problems that are caused by remoteness. The issues that we are discussing today are not at all new, and we should be reminded of the issues and challenges that have arisen along the way.

I would, of course, be the first person to acknowledge the progress that was made by the previous Executive. I would want to list the ways in which progress was made, and I am sure that my colleagues in the Liberal Democrats—who did so much work relating to rural Scotland—would agree with me. However, I also support much of the approach that has been outlined by the cabinet secretary. She has given details of some of the issues that we will need to tackle when developing services for our remote and rural communities. Despite some of her comments, I hope that we can use the experience of MSPs of all parties, who are acutely aware of issues in their constituencies and are finely tuned to the needs of their constituents. I hope that we can use that experience consensually to work with national health service staff—professionals and volunteers—to develop services. Obviously, we should also work with staff in the social care sector.

I have to say, however, that I was rather disappointed with the tone that the cabinet secretary struck when talking about what I regard as legitimate criticisms and legitimate points that have been raised. That tone has to be shifted. When we tell the Government that we think that serious issues have emerged from the model of funding that it is using, or when we raise points about any other issues and say that we are concerned and think that the issues need to be interrogated and tested, it is beneath the office of the cabinet secretary simply to dismiss—yet again—our concerns as "scaremongering". You have to pay attention to concerns that are raised in Parliament, be more courteous and deal with the substance of the concerns.

Nicola Sturgeon: I am more than happy to engage in debate, but debate usually involves suggesting solutions as well as making criticisms.

Does Margaret Curran agree that she was being irresponsible when she gave a quotation to a newspaper saying that if the formula were implemented immediately, X health boards would lose funding? She should also have said that the formula is not going to be implemented immediately in full.

Margaret Curran: I think you should pay attention to the exact details of what I said. My argument is not about the amount but about the share, and you know that full well, cabinet secretary. My key point to you is that we have to create an environment in which we interrogate the issues and deal with the substance of the points that are raised. Alternative views should not simply be dismissed out of hand.

We know that the SNP Government's current funding proposals are causing real difficulties the length and breadth of Scotland. You have to recognise that and address it.

The Minister for Public Health (Shona Robison): Will the member take an intervention?

Margaret Curran: No. I did Nicola Sturgeon the courtesy of taking an intervention, but she did not do me the same courtesy. I would prefer it if you would allow me to pursue my argument.

As *The Herald* reported on Monday, major concerns have arisen among senior health board figures about the current funding proposals. I presume that you cannot dismiss them so easily. Although the new NRAC formula retains the same structure as Arbutnott—taking a weighted-population approach—it revises the measurements of population, age, sex, need and remoteness effect. We need to discuss the revision of those measurements and assess the impact of that throughout Scotland. The fact that the revision lessens the impact of those factors needs to be understood throughout Scotland. The overall effect is that shares of funding will be reduced for some rural health boards, because their share of the excess cost weighting will fall.

Concerns about the revision are serious, because it will have an impact on services. Many concerns will emerge in the debate. I remember well that when Nicola Sturgeon was in opposition, I often told her, "You can't just criticise; you need to suggest solutions." If I were the health minister who received the NRAC recommendations, I would not just say, "Thank you very much. I don't care about the consequences and anyone who dares criticise is not to be listened to." Any minister who receives recommendations in a report has a responsibility to determine and deal with their full impact. [*Interruption.*] It is inappropriate behaviour for a minister to dismiss concerns and shout from a sedentary position. The considerations are serious.

Shona Robison: Will the member take an intervention?

Margaret Curran: No, thank you.

We are talking about the range of resources from funding for ambulance services to funding to ensure equal access to major Government commitments for the health of remote and rural communities, such as the out-of-hours service. To progress telecare effectively, we need to pursue how it will be funded. I hope that the minister will talk about the commitments to the out-of-hours service and how they will be funded in rural and remote areas. Doctors have serious concerns about how surgeries will operate. I presume that when the Government makes a general commitment to the out-of-hours service, it does not add in brackets, "Sorry—that doesn't apply in some areas."

A rural experience from which we can all learn is the situation in the Western Isles. I know the Western Isles well from many visits there in my ministerial life and I am familiar with the deep concerns of many people there about leadership and management in Western Isles NHS Board. The parliamentary process has properly considered and interrogated that, but I will focus on a dimension that is significant to the Government's practical work: the appointment process in the NHS. I hope that the minister will address that.

I will ask the minister a direct question. I will be careful in my wording, Presiding Officer, because I know that I am a miscreant. Will she reassure Parliament that all senior appointments in the NHS will be made on the basis of open interview and competitive procedure and will be transparent? *[Interruption.]* I ask that question genuinely; there is no need for conflict.

Nicola Sturgeon: Margaret Curran makes an important point, but will she acknowledge that the appointments in NHS Western Isles that have attracted much criticism were made under her Government?

Margaret Curran: I say with the greatest respect that the cabinet secretary has missed the point. The point is not party political. *[Laughter.]*

The Presiding Officer: Order.

Margaret Curran: The point is not political. It is about the NHS's management. The NHS's appointments procedures are governed not by politicians, but by its administration. When the cabinet secretary looks into that, she will find that the point is administrative and not political. If she seeks to make party-political points, she misunderstands the situation. We are missing a significant opportunity to discuss the issues in the Western Isles properly rather than in a partisan

manner. I therefore hope that the Minister for Public Health will reassure Parliament that appointments throughout the NHS will be open and transparent, as I have recommended.

I hope that the Labour amendment's reference to union learning representatives finds wider support in Parliament. I am sure that many of us agree that union learning reps make an extremely valuable contribution in remote and rural settings, as they do throughout Scotland. Employer-union learning agreements have been brokered in Highland NHS Board and Tayside NHS Board. I hope that they will be implemented throughout Scotland.

One in five people in Scotland lives in a remote and rural area. We know that service models that are effective in urban areas might be unsuitable in remote and rural locations and that services need to be accessible and of the highest quality. To achieve that, we need a determined and sustained effort. The debate is important and funding is at its heart. It is deeply disappointing that such issues have been dismissed lightly, but we will pursue them on behalf of people who live in remote and rural areas.

I move amendment S3M-2056.2, to insert at end:

"and recognises the contribution made to remote and rural training by union learning representatives, however, expresses concern regarding the future funding under the NHS Scotland Resource Allocation Committee of rural NHS boards that are facing particular pressures regarding service delivery, including out-of-hours GP services and the provision of ambulance services."

09:40

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Margaret Curran talked about Western Isles NHS Board. On behalf of all of us and for the sake of NHS staff and patients in the Western Isles, I hope that people there can now look forward to a period of stability.

I commend all those who contributed to the excellent report on remote and rural health care. Urban models, such as that for allocating funding under the NRAC formula, are all too often inappropriate to rural health care, particularly given that, for example, the out-of-hours service in the Highlands costs five times more than that in Glasgow. We are minded to support the Liberal amendment, but we would like to hear more. We will decide whether to support the Labour amendment after hearing more speeches.

The report highlights well the differences of remote and rural areas, such as the higher suicide rates, higher incidence of alcohol-related disease, higher number of accidents on roads and through climbing, farming, diving and fishing, and the

palliative care workload, which the cabinet secretary mentioned. I pay tribute to the excellent work of Marie Curie Cancer Care and Macmillan Cancer Support nurses in the Highlands, where many people choose to die in their own homes and localities.

The proposed integrated teams that would be based in GP practices and the potential increase in mobile diagnostic facilities for aneurysm, breast and osteoporosis screening are good news for locally delivered health care. My colleagues throughout Scotland tell me that GPs in remote and rural areas are asking for the flexibility to do what meets the needs of patients in their localities, rather than be forced to follow centrally prescribed agendas. I will leave the matter there—that debate is for another day.

It is worrying to read in the report that the workforce in remote and rural areas

“is ageing and organised”—

if “organised” is the right word—

“in a fragmented and reactive way.”

We have heard about integration, partnership working and seamless care for many years. The situation has improved, but there is still a long way to go to put the patient at the heart of the service.

The role of allied health professionals is not entirely clear. Given the 18-week target for referral to a consultant, it is possible to see a consultant long before one can see a podiatrist or a physiotherapist. Waits for psychiatry and psychology services, particularly in the Highlands, are very long and just as difficult.

The role of community and rural general hospitals is critical to the model of care: my colleague Murdo Fraser will say more about community hospitals.

I will concentrate on two issues: mental health services and the Scottish Ambulance Service, although I have scored out quite a lot of what I planned to say about the Ambulance Service because of yesterday's statement. I commend NHS 24 for developing cognitive behavioural therapy in the islands. That is an excellent example of the delivery of high-quality professional care and support over the telephone to meet the needs of patients in isolated areas.

It is disappointing that NHS Highland has not provided the small amount that is needed to fund the Depression Alliance Scotland self-help group in Inverness. When people take the initiative and the time to understand and address their mental health problems, surely we should encourage that. The report concluded that consistent difficulties were experienced in managing patients with mental health crises, especially out of hours. Early

diagnosis and intervention are as essential in rural areas as they are elsewhere—for example, to prevent mild depression from becoming severe and chronic. However, there is no doubt that community hospitals could be enhanced to deal with mental health and various other issues, as outlined on page 18 of the report.

Although an inquiry is being carried out into the management of the Scottish Ambulance Service, we cannot ignore the substantial part of the report on that service, or the fact that many aspects of patient care are dependent on it. I will move my amendment, although I appreciate that many of the issues were addressed in yesterday's ministerial statement on the Scottish Ambulance Service. To give some examples of the issues, there is a lack of an integrated response, delays occur in accessing health care, little or no planning or co-ordination takes place within agencies, and there is a fragmented approach in which there is duplication and inefficient use of resources.

The report asks for a nationally co-ordinated response and suggests that the service be

“more embedded in the NHS Territorial Boards”.

A merger of the Scottish Ambulance Service with NHS boards is not our policy or something that we have discussed but, in the current circumstances and with the serious issues relating to patient care, the suggestion is undoubtedly worthy of further consideration. I hope that the Government inquiry into the Scottish Ambulance Service considers not only what is happening in the service, but how the service works in partnership with other agencies. I cannot say much about the target on responding to 999 calls, given that the data collection is questionable. I simply point out that there is a target to respond to 63 per cent of calls within eight minutes, although people in Bettyhill have a 1 per cent chance of seeing an ambulance in that time.

Page 51 of the report comments on support workers. I am not sure who the new generic support workers are, but the Conservative party welcomes support for young families from all backgrounds. However, my understanding is that a support worker is not a registered nurse and does not have the training and experience of a health visitor. Health visitors are paid at band 6 or 7, but support workers are paid at band 3 or 4, yet they are expected to support individuals with self-care, to carry out health promotion work, to manage chronic conditions, to prevent unnecessary hospital admissions, to support young families and to screen people who are over 75. Although all health professionals have a role, we do not want support workers to be expected to do the work of health visitors but at a significantly lower salary.

I move amendment S3M-2056.1, to insert at end:

“further notes the concerns raised regarding the provision of ambulance services, and asks the Scottish Government to ensure that those living in rural communities are not disadvantaged.”

09:48

Ross Finnie (West of Scotland) (LD): I am delighted that we are having a debate on rural health care, as this is the first occasion since the new Government was formed on which I have been able to talk about rural matters, with which I am somewhat familiar.

The Liberal Democrats welcome the thrust of the report “Delivering for Remote and Rural Healthcare”. To refer back to my time as a minister, I well remember taking a close interest in the remote and rural areas resource initiative that was worked up by a team at Raigmore hospital in Inverness—although the team was based in Inverness, the work that it carried out covered the whole of rural Scotland, not just the Highlands and Islands. Therefore, I am pleased that the report builds on that work and adds substantially to that initial thinking. As the cabinet secretary made clear in her opening remarks, the principle is that everyone in Scotland has the right to expect the same standard of health care wherever they live, and we must recognise that; but, equally, as the initial work of RARARI pointed out and as the report makes explicit, profound differences exist in how we must model the delivery of health care services to meet the needs of rural communities.

I will not recite all those differences, as they are set out well in the report and because I see that almost all the members here represent rural areas, so that would be teaching grandmothers to suck eggs and would be a bit patronising. I will confine myself to measures in the report not only to which the Liberal Democrats want to give our clear support, but about which we feel passionate because they bear a close resemblance to measures in our most recent manifesto.

The general thrust of the report must chime with the approach to individual issues. The report suggests that we need to extend the community care model and acknowledge the differences, which the report brings out, between the primary care model that we need to develop and the current system, which uses an urban model. It is striking how different the suggested model is—it must improve the patient experience of primary care.

The report talks about an enhanced role and improved model for remote community hospitals, particularly in anticipatory care, and shifting the balance of care so that it is more locally based.

That chimes with our view on the need to sustain small rural and community hospitals. Access to sustainable secondary care is a matter of considerable interest, as is the task of eliminating the disturbing variations in treatment in rural general hospitals. As the cabinet secretary pointed out, we need to develop the model so that it provides the hub for a range of services in rural communities. However, I caution those who talk about such developments that my colleagues Tavish Scott, Liam McArthur and Jamie Stone, who is here, believe that some of the services that are claimed as enhancements existed before. That is a minor point.

Some key aspects are particularly important in the rural context. The recruitment, development and retention of the workforce are perennial problems that threaten the quality of delivery in many rural areas. Therefore, the increase in specific remote and rural education through RRHEAL—I am grateful to the cabinet secretary for reducing that mouthful for us in her opening remarks—is an important development. It is difficult to attract people into the service but, when we do, they understand how important and rewarding it is. Getting them there in the first place and providing training is critical, so we must develop the infrastructure to support rural practices.

A further issue that is mentioned in the report is telemedicine. As was the case more than a year ago, we still need to do more work on that. In Scotland, we have failed to grasp the opportunities that telemedicine presents. We should consider the international experience. In Canada, telemedicine is developed in a much more determined way in huge areas. It is unfortunate that, in some parts of rural Scotland, telemedicine is seen as an alternative to a doctor visiting, rather than as an enhancement of the service. The technology is available, it works in other places and we need to develop it.

Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): Will the member give way?

Ross Finnie: No—I will press on, because I want to make a point about the purpose of our amendment that I hope will be helpful to Mary Scanlon and other Conservative members.

We want the report to be effective, but it could—I stress that word—be undermined if the funding of health boards is either unfair or seen to be unfair. I want to be clear, as the point may be important. The Liberal Democrats supported the establishment of the Arbuthnott committee and, when in government, we supported its replacement with the NHS Scotland resource allocation committee, or NRAC. We believe that it is right to establish a means of allocation that is based on objective criteria and we continue to

support that principle and approach, not just using the current criteria but criteria as they are developed and refined to reflect poverty and health inequalities. However, we have grave reservations about the fact that, having studied the NRAC report in depth, health boards in remote and rural areas have serious questions about the basis on which some of the criteria were developed and may be applied.

My colleague Jeremy Purvis will develop that point in more detail by reference to the findings of NHS Borders. The problem is not simply that concerns have come to light; just as important is the fact that because NRAC is not currently operating—it has not been stood down—and no standing committee has been established, there is no forum for NHS boards in remote and rural areas to raise their concerns, seek satisfactory explanations or have their concerns resolved. In that vacuum, the NRAC-based allocations are perceived to be unfair and the system might be undermined. Hence, our amendment calls for the immediate establishment of a standing committee, as called for in the NRAC report. I am grateful to the cabinet secretary for expressing her willingness to accept that suggestion, and I hope that the explanation that I have given helps to persuade the Conservatives to stick by such principles. We think that genuine issues exist that could affect the delivery of services in rural areas and that addressing them requires the amendment to be agreed to.

I move amendment S3M-2056.3, to insert at end:

“and in line with recommendation 10.12 of the NHS Scotland Resource Allocation Committee’s (NRAC) report calls on the Scottish Government to establish without delay a standing committee to lead work on the future development of the NHS board funding formula and to come forward with details on the precise membership, format and remit of the committee, and further calls on the Scottish Government to review the impact of the NRAC report on NHS boards’ ability to maintain and develop remote and rural services.”

The Presiding Officer: We move to the open debate. Speeches should be around six minutes, please.

09:56

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): I welcome the temperate and considered speech that my colleague on the Health and Sport Committee, Ross Finnie, has just made.

The foreword to “Delivering for Remote and Rural Healthcare” mentions the objectives of delivering

“a strategy for sustainable healthcare in remote and rural Scotland”

and

“workforce planning arrangements to support the remote and rural agenda.”

The report contains a diagram that shows the relationships between district general hospitals, community hospitals and extended community care teams. I want to explore those with reference to an area that I know well—the Scottish Borders—against the area’s background of an ageing population and the demands of that, a lack of public transport, long distances and the often historic existing facilities. Areas elsewhere in rural Scotland have a similar background.

We should all welcome a strategy that is not a straitjacket. We know that the cabinet secretary’s approach must have built-in flexibility to reflect the topographical differences between, say, the island communities, the Highland mainland, the Scottish Borders and other parts of the south of Scotland. There are remote places and isolated farmhouses in the valleys of the Borders, but the Borders also contain many historic communities, such as Jedburgh, Selkirk and Peebles, which have a culture of proud autonomy. It is to be regretted that, in the face of fierce local opposition, the previous Labour-Liberal Administration supported the closure of the community hospitals in Jedburgh and Coldstream, but effective, efficient and modernised community hospitals, such as Hawick community hospital and Hay Lodge hospital in Peebles, remain.

Hay Lodge hospital is currently at war with the health board over a proposed reduction in the number of long-term beds—I will address that matter shortly. I have met the cabinet secretary, the board and the GP practice at Hay Lodge hospital, and it seems to me that, although on paper there is excess bed provision seasonally across the Borders as a whole and the board may be able to make staff savings—particularly agency savings; all members know that agencies are costly—by not servicing beds, there is no spare capacity at Hay Lodge hospital. I understand the logic behind the board’s thinking that there will be economic savings through discharging an elderly Peebles patient to, say, Hawick community hospital, but the patient’s family, the community and I do not think that doing so would be in that person’s medical, psychological or social interest when they could be placed locally, within reach of their family and friends in Peebles, and not have to use public transport, which is, as I have said, poor in the area. NHS Borders is, of course, responsible for making 2 per cent savings across its budget and balancing its books—indeed, I think that it did so for the first time in the previous financial year—but I ask the cabinet secretary to

keep a watching brief on the problem, which may be replicated elsewhere. I know that she will do so.

Page 18 of the report contains commitments. It states:

“CHPs should review their Community Hospitals to determine which, if any, should be enhanced”.

The responsibilities at bullet points 5, 6 and 7 would be affected if long-term stay beds at Hay Lodge hospital closed. Palliative care, out-patient treatment and so on would be affected.

On NRAC, it has been said that the previous Administration established the independent committee, but that does not mean that members of that Administration or anyone else must follow it slavishly. That is the key point. Obviously, concern exists that rural boards may be losing out. The cabinet secretary has given an assurance that no board will lose out and that measures will be phased in, and in attending to the Liberal Democrat amendment she agreed to keep things under review and to set up a standing committee. That is the way forward. If we fight such wars in the local press, we may stir up more problems—*[Interruption.]* I am trying to be straight. If we fight such wars in the local press, we may stir up more problems than may or may not exist. The way forward is through cool heads considering the matter. Indeed, the report says that the report itself should be considered against the background of the NRAC review, which predated it. We have sets of information that need to be assessed together.

Margaret Curran *rose*—

Christine Grahame: I want to move on. I have only six minutes in total.

On staff issues, we should consider the delays in implementing the agenda for change. That is not a Scottish Parliament issue, but it has huge ramifications for personnel in NHS boards. I think that Mary Scanlon referred to the matter. Many personnel simply do not yet know what their job description is or what they will be paid. Differentials appear to exist in NHS board areas, and many people who have been reassessed are waiting for their pay in arrears. That is destabilising.

Against that background, a reassessment is having be made of allied health professionals and what they deliver. NHS Borders nominated itself to take part in a pilot on that. The cabinet secretary met me and health professionals to discuss the matter. The health professionals were concerned that things were moving too rapidly. They wanted more consultation, as district nurses, health visitors and school nurses do different jobs. Difficulties are involved, but members must face up to the fact that there is a huge lack of recruits in

those areas and there are ageing medical professionals. We cannot simply put our finger in the dyke and say, “We’ll try to stop this happening.” We must look for consensual solutions.

I look forward to the rest of the debate and commend Ross Finnie for his temperate amendment, which is, of course, out of kilter with what Jeremy Purvis thinks, although Jeremy Purvis is out of kilter most of the time.

10:02

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): I am pleased to take part in this debate on remote and rural health care and I welcome the report. The cabinet secretary is pleased to endorse its recommendations and is committed to acting on them, but we have yet to hear a commitment on making extra funds available so that the proposals will be implemented.

The report details what is happening in rural Scotland and outlines future aspirations. Those aspirations would lead to a standard of health care in remote and rural communities that approaches the same standard as that in urban Scotland. However, in describing rural general hospitals, it lists only the minimum services that are required. That greatly concerned a great number of people, because some rural general hospitals already provide a more comprehensive service. Let us consider, for example, the obstetrician-led maternity service at Caithness general hospital. The health board has given a commitment that that service will remain; I would be grateful if the minister did the same.

Shona Robison: The member has just said that the report referred to the minimum level of service that we would expect. Where there are more comprehensive services, we would, of course, expect them to be retained, just as we expect the obstetrician-led service at Caithness to be retained.

Rhoda Grant: I am grateful to the minister for that reassurance. I am sure that the people of Caithness will be grateful for it, too.

The report states that there has been a rise in hospital admissions because of the failure of out-of-hours care in remote and rural areas. We all know that it costs five times more to deliver out-of-hours care. The rise in hospital admissions when such care fails adds to the costs that rural health boards bear. When funding is cut in real terms, it does not reflect the real costs of delivering rural health care, and leaves little room for ambition. Delivering services as close to people as possible in remote and rural communities means higher costs. Consultants who travel to patients in rural areas cost more; they are travelling rather than

seeing more patients. We should acknowledge that they cost more, but we must also be clear that such an approach is right. It is difficult for people to travel long distances to access health services. They are often worried about receiving bad news, and being a long way from home makes a bad situation a lot worse.

The report's emphasis on telemedicine and the use of other technologies is welcome. Such technologies will also have benefits in delivering health care in more urban settings. Where possible, such services should be delivered at home or as close to home as possible.

The report also talks about team working, which should surely be happening already, but when health care staff are few and far between, that presents a challenge for team working, as people seldom work together. The report mentions multiskilling and the current review of community nursing, but the pilots have just begun and it would be sensible to await their outcome before proceeding. All staff groups, especially those that are most directly affected, should be involved in implementing the measures.

The report makes a passing reference to what I would term one of the really good models of rural health delivery. The Howard Doris centre in Lochcarron provides care for all parts of the community, from nursing home care and sheltered housing to respite care and medical beds. That means that some people do not need to be admitted to hospital and ensures that those who do can move closer to home more quickly. The centre delivers health and local government services seamlessly, so why does it merit only a passing reference in the report? I fear that it is because it is a community-led initiative. In providing cross-service care and the level of service that local people require, it is a model that really delivers. If the Government is keen on matching rhetoric with action, it could do an awful lot worse than use that model in areas where there is little or no in-patient support.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): The Howard Doris centre is funded jointly by NHS Highland and Highland Council. Does Rhoda Grant agree that there is a question mark over Highland Council's funding of many social work services that would impinge on something like the Howard Doris centre?

Rhoda Grant: Indeed. However, my point is that if the community had not brought forward that initiative, there would be no joint funding. It was the community that raised the money, pulled forward the initiative and then drew down the money from both the national health service and local government to make it work. Getting the two services to work together to provide similar services in other areas has proved difficult, and I

suggest that communities be given that amount of input to services that are delivered locally. Indeed, the services that are delivered in places such as the Howard Doris centre could be added to telemedicine and the like to ensure that local people could attend clinics remotely and would not have to travel to centres.

The report talks about ambulance service technicians undertaking planned home visits to carry out risk assessments. Ambulance staff form part of the emergency service, so I imagine that it is difficult—if not impossible—for them to play a part in planned health care. Patient transport service staff could do the job more easily. Unfortunately, patient transport staff are thin on the ground in rural areas—indeed, the service depends on volunteers who are not properly compensated for their time and expenses. That is a false economy, as the patient transport service has been forced to use taxis, which is hardly a good use of public money.

I welcome what the report says about education, and I pay tribute to union learning reps who identify training needs in remote and rural areas. I also pay tribute to the university of the Highlands and Islands, which offers education up to degree level in rural health care. I suggest that that is a suitable institution to develop remote and rural health care education and training.

I recently became acutely aware of the challenges of providing health care in remote and rural areas when members of my family were unwell. What is a worrying time under normal conditions takes on a whole new dimension when one is struggling with distance. In providing services in remote and rural areas, we must ensure that the needs of the patient are central. In implementing the report, we must force out services on the ground—that must be our priority.

10:08

Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): In order to make this work and to ensure equality of delivery of health care services in our remote and rural communities, we must take some specifically targeted approaches that are different from those taken in urban areas. I will list some of those approaches.

At the point of first response, we must strengthen the community resilience model, which works at the most local level. The first responder scheme is a good example, as it understands that concerned citizens in a remote community can act as the front-line service for health and monitor how people behave. The scheme needs more money and resources, and it needs to have more people trained. It needs a stable population of people who have the time to do such things. Community

transport to hospitals is one part of that, but the identification and stabilisation of people in the community—which is what first responders do—must be built in. The scheme is very special and requires that each community be involved in the design of its model.

Secondly, we need more specific information about how the remote community resource hubs will work. Where will the hubs be? How many of them are there? Are they all based around community hospitals? That is just not possible in the north-west of Sutherland, which is 70 or 80 miles from the nearest rural hospital. Because there is no community hospital there, another centre must be identified and developed, which is not an easy job given the geography of the area. We need more specific information about remote community resource hubs.

Rhoda Grant: Surely the problems that Rob Gibson outlines would be solved by initiatives such as the Howard Doris centre. Such a centre would be an excellent facility for north-west Sutherland.

Rob Gibson: As far as I am concerned, the community of Lochcarron has a model that suits its area and geography. North-west Sutherland is very different. However, the need for local control of health services is a matter to which I will return if I have time.

On telemedicine, which Ross Finnie mentioned, a practical consideration is the fact that we do not have a proper map of broadband coverage in Scotland. Although 98 per cent of the population can receive broadband, about 30 per cent of the land area in remote areas is still not served. We need a map of that for telemedicine to work in the remotest areas, such as the islands and the north-west.

We must also consider the networks that the plan envisages. We need explicit mapping of those and a buy-in by the health boards, managers and clinicians who are involved. It is particularly important that the larger health boards explicitly recognise their responsibilities in that respect—it should be added to their list of key performance indicators—because they have such a wide variety of circumstances. We know from the debate that we had on the ambulance service that the situation in Wick is different from the situation in Kinlochbervie. We must make performance indicators that relate to service provision in the remotest areas part of what the health boards are expected to do.

Of course, underpinning the provision of health care in remote and rural areas is the ability of all staff to be able to do their jobs in those circumstances. That is why we must ensure that, at long last, the royal colleges and other training bodies for doctors, nurses and allied health

professionals are signed up to the training that is required. That will be a small but, nonetheless, enormously important part of their business. We have talked about the issue over the past 10 years of the Scottish Parliament, and the publication of this more comprehensive report indicates that the Government is now determined to bring those matters to bear. If we are to have a standing committee on how NRAC will work, we must engage fully with the royal colleges to ensure that they deliver for remote and rural areas.

I return to the issue of financial support. Part of the issue in the health service—and in every public service in remote and rural areas—is the need to have a rural poverty index or, as exists in Scandinavia, a form of equivalence that builds into the normal funding a recognition that our geography is as it is and that we must meet the needs of the people who live in it. It is not enough that urban areas are regarded as normal, rural areas are regarded as abnormal and remote areas are regarded as extremely abnormal—we cannot take that approach. RARARI did some good work in the previous session, although it was wound up, and is a good model for how we should deliver services in remote and rural areas. We also need the finance department to buy into the provision of all services in remote and rural areas.

Given the problems with the provision of care at Caladh Sona, Melness and the Assynt centre, both the health board and the social work department require to be funded in a way that allows the work that they do together to be done smoothly. Funding is tight, so it looks as though some projects will be lower priorities than others, and the psycho-geriatric hospital that will be built at Migdale for that part of Sutherland could take from both pots money that is available for the creation of resources in far-flung parts. We must ensure that we consider funding across all public services, including health. We should not think that we have to create an NRAC or an Arbutnott formula every five or 10 years. Funding should be built in.

10:15

Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab): I will focus on two aspects of remote and rural health care. The first is policy and resources, and I will give an extremely distressing example of the impact that the failure to deliver quality care has, not just on the patient but on their immediate family. The second aspect is the emergency response service and the Scotland-wide problem with the co-ordination of transport, which is crucial not just for those in remote and rural areas but for everyone in Scotland.

As we prepare for debates, politicians strive week in, week out to inform ourselves of the

contents of various reports. We recognise with humility that we can never do justice to the incredible efforts of the authors of those reports, and that is particularly true of "Delivering for Remote and Rural Healthcare". I read with interest the summary report on the Nuffield scholarships to Australia and the comparative analysis that it provides, which describes truly remote living. I readily acknowledge that, although the Dunfermline East constituency undoubtedly has rural characteristics, I have no expert knowledge or experience of the more crucial challenges of remoteness, which are vital to the debate. However, during my service on the Health Committee in session 2, I had the privilege of travelling throughout the Western Isles, from Barra to Uist, over a number of days, and I learned directly from clinicians, patients and health board members of the challenges that confront them daily.

Our opinions as politicians are shaped in many ways. Primarily, we seek to ensure that our constituents' experiences are embraced by the reports that we read and addressed in as realistic and practical a way as possible. Above all, we know that policy documents gather dust on shelves throughout the country. A policy truly becomes policy only when it is matched with adequate financial resources. If policy change is to happen, the allocation of funding is required.

The amount of service change that is required to implement the commitments in "Delivering for Remote and Rural Healthcare" should not be underestimated. I recognise—and I am sure that others recognise—that it is vital that the Scottish Government allocate funding, as called for in the report, for the appointment of a national programme manager. They must have the appropriate administrative assistance to enable them to support NHS boards and other groups in the implementation of the policy changes.

Labour has always recognised that remote and rural communities require a different and tailored approach to health care provision. We showed that with our implementation of the Arbutnott formula for the funding of health boards, which recognised the additional costs of delivery in those areas. Although there is some recognition of that in the new NRAC formula, it is less transparent, and the cuts in funding to many of the rural health boards are worrying.

The revised NRAC formula will be phased in over a number of years, starting in 2009-10. Although no board will receive less in cash terms, boards' shares will change dramatically. The gap between current spending and the NRAC formula shows big gains for Lothian and Lanarkshire and big losses for Ayrshire and Arran, Highland and Glasgow. The implementation of the NRAC

formula will reduce the share that Glasgow and those other boards receive and will increase inequality. NRAC replaces Arbutnott as the target, not the allocation. If the Arbutnott index had been retained with the new unmet need weighting, Glasgow's target would have increased.

Nicola Sturgeon: This might be the point that Helen Eadie is making—I am not sure—but for absolute clarity, will she concede that, compared with the Arbutnott target shares, Glasgow actually does better under NRAC?

Helen Eadie: I remain to be convinced about that.

Funding is central to the report in every way. It makes the key point that the Scottish Government should consider providing funding to appoint a national programme manager with appropriate assistance to ensure that capacity is built to support the implementation of the remote and rural framework.

I said at the outset that policy and resources are crucial, but they need to be matched to the needs of constituents. At the heart of my concerns is what we can learn from patients' experiences in Scotland, be they in remote and rural areas or elsewhere. What is their experience of the NHS in Scotland today? My concern is not just for the patient but for his or her family. Take the recent experience of Mr and Mrs X, who are real people. Mrs X arrived home on a Friday night and was informed by answering machine that she has cancer. The message came from clinicians who had left for the weekend but had not said where the family could get more information or support until the Monday morning. Imagine the horror, panic, fear and trepidation of being left to fester for 64 hours until contact could be made once more with the clinicians. Then the specialist nurse went on holiday and no one was put in place to take over. The cabinet secretary was written to, but after seven weeks she still had not responded to the family's concerns. There is no support for the now demented husband, who sits up night after night. I need say no more. The support was simply not there.

I will touch on the crucial issue of transport. From my experience as an elected representative, I am 100 per cent certain that there is a lack of integrated response to transport needs. That has been raised with me consistently in every forum that I have ever attended, from one end of Scotland to the other. The problem results in delays for patients in accessing appropriate health care. Health-related transport is provided by a range of providers and agencies including voluntary drivers, the patient transport service, and neonatal and paediatric retrieval services.

I am pleased to learn that there is to be a pilot to demonstrate the benefits of an emergency medical retrieval service, but there is little or no planning or co-ordination between and within agencies. The result is a fragmented approach that sometimes results in duplication, which is an inefficient use of scarce resources. Transport infrastructure is crucial in the support of health care in remote and rural communities, but it is not the responsibility of any one organisation.

I support the amendment in Margaret Curran's name.

10:22

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I welcome the debate and hope that it will help to bring positive changes and improved health services to remote and rural communities in Scotland. As my colleague Mary Scanlon said, the Scottish Conservatives support the recommendations in "Delivering for Remote and Rural Healthcare". It is essential that a specific model of health care is put in place that is appropriate for remote and rural communities. We need a health service that works for those communities and does not ignore them. I welcome the remarks that the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing made at the beginning of the debate, when she set out her personal commitment to ensuring that those in rural areas are not disadvantaged.

I will take the opportunity to raise a constituency matter, if members will allow me to do so. Highland Perthshire certainly falls within the definition of remote and rural areas, and that applies particularly to the Rannoch area. For all that Rannoch is at the heart of Scotland, it has all the characteristics of a mainland peninsula or even an island community, such is its remoteness from centres of population and the lack of good transport links.

People in the Rannoch area, some of whom have come along to this morning's debate and are in the public gallery, are concerned about what they perceive to be reductions in the health services that they receive in their remote area. I know that the constituency member, who is the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth, will have raised those concerns directly with his Cabinet colleague, but I have been asked to raise them in the chamber today. I put on the record my thanks to members of the local community in Kinloch Rannoch who have been campaigning tirelessly to get improved health services for the area.

There is widespread concern in Rannoch about changes to the out-of-hours service following the opting out of the local GP practice. NHS Tayside

allowed the Kinloch Rannoch medical practice to opt out of out-of-hours service in May 2006. When the serving GP retired earlier this year, the contract for GP cover was awarded to the nearby Aberfeldy practice, but there was no requirement to reinstate out-of-hours cover. People in the Rannoch area are concerned that lives might be put at risk due to the changed arrangements.

The case is made far more eloquently than I could make it in correspondence that I have received from constituents. I will quote briefly from two letters.

The first is from a constituent in Dall in Rannoch, whose statement relates to recent call-outs for medical help by the wife of an ill husband, both of whom are in their late 80s:

"I think the present system is totally inadequate, I know there are a lot of elderly people in this area. I would want the local medical practice to take back responsibility for out-of-hours cover, as in the past. I believe that the Aberfeldy Practice should cover out-of-hours in the Rannoch Area and put doctors in for that purpose, for medical reasons above all. The present system has been shown to be unsafe."

The second quotation comes from another constituent from the same area and refers to a specific incident that occurred recently:

"My mother, 89 years old, had breathing difficulties on February 16th 2008—a Saturday. I called the Doctor through NHS 24 and he said he'd arrive within four hours. He arrived in about three hours. The doctor was concerned with my mother's rapid heart beat and pulse rate and issued a prescription for these symptoms. My husband drove to Pitlochry and back to access a Pharmacy. This meant a 54 mile round trip and at 4.30pm my mother was able to start medication. This delay could have been saved if the NHS 24 doctor had access to the dispensary service in the Kinloch Rannoch Medical Practice."

The fear locally is that only a tragedy in the area will result in an improved health service for Rannoch.

Shona Robison: I understand the member's concerns, but does he accept that NHS Tayside has said clearly that it expects, along with the Aberfeldy practice, to engage the local community to address many of the issues that he has raised?

Murdo Fraser: I am aware that NHS Tayside has said that, but the local community believes that it is not getting a service that meets its needs. It believes that NHS Tayside is not fully aware either of the strength of feeling in the local community or, perhaps more seriously, of some of the risks attached to the current situation.

The situation has been made worse by recent changes to ambulance cover. Previously, two full-time ambulances were stationed in Pitlochry, but that has been downgraded to one. The cabinet secretary knows my concerns about that, as I have written to her; despite her response my

concerns remain. Worse still, the rapid response unit that was based in Aberfeldy has recently been moved to Pitlochry, which is further away from Kinloch Rannoch. I understand that in large rural areas we cannot expect the ambulance response times that we see in cities. However, it is a matter of serious concern, particularly where we no longer have out-of-hours cover, to see a reduction in ambulance cover that is continuing.

In her statement yesterday, the cabinet secretary announced an independent evaluation of the front-loaded model of ambulance delivery. That model has led to the deployment of the rapid response units. I ask her, as part of the review, to look specifically at the question of ambulance cover in Highland Perthshire.

In addition, I invite the cabinet secretary to visit Kinloch Rannoch and meet local residents to discuss their genuine fears about the future of the health care service in the area. I would be happy to facilitate such a meeting. I hope that she or the Minister for Public Health will respond specifically to my comments, either at the close of the debate or, if she prefers, in writing. The community is concerned that lives are at risk. We must ensure that our rural and remote communities are not disadvantaged.

10:28

Ian McKee (Lothians) (SNP): Not so long ago, the health needs of rural communities tended to be dismissed on the ground that, if people lived far from centres of population, they could not expect to receive such a high standard of service. That situation continued for far longer than it might, notwithstanding the Dewar report in 1912, simply because country dwellers are hardy folk. They put up with complaints and conditions that those used to the softer life of towns and cities would have found unbearable.

Today, the provision of a high standard of health care in rural communities is a challenge facing countries throughout the world. With the advent of television and improved methods of communication, people living in rural areas rightly demand as far as possible the same standards of health care as are provided elsewhere.

Until recently, that demand was becoming ever more difficult to satisfy for other reasons. Standards of professional practice, often laid down by specialists whose entire training and experience was city based, meant that hospital services were becoming more centralised. The concept that improved outcomes are more likely when more services are performed also tended to centralise services, while the final nail for local services seemed to be driven home when the European working time directive shortened

doctors' working hours, so that more doctors are required to provide 24-hour cover.

The results were proposals, especially in the acute services review of 1998, to centralise fairly basic hospital services so much that many people living in the Highlands and other rural areas had to travel for hours over country roads to have a test or attend an out-patient appointment. However, there was a silver lining to that sad state of affairs. Services became, or threatened to become, so outrageously poor that the philosophy of centralisation was revisited and, as it is a worldwide problem, lessons were sought from the experience in other countries, such as Australia, Canada and Norway.

It turns out that not all hospital services need to be centralised to be efficient. Whereas cancer care is better carried out in a centre of excellence, many other hospital procedures can be carried out in a rural or community hospital just as safely as in a larger centre. We welcome the cabinet secretary's decision to secure the future of six rural general hospitals and her general commitment to develop a framework for sustainable health care in remote and rural communities.

Health care is not all about hospitals. Most services are provided in the communities in which people live. Here, too, rural communities face special problems. For example, people living in Kilchoan, at the tip of the Ardnamurchan peninsula, are not only 50 miles and a ferry crossing from the Belford hospital in Fort William but an hour's drive along a single-track road from the nearest doctor, who lives at Salen. There is a weekly surgery in the village, but the doctor is a long way away in an emergency. The same circumstances pertain in many rural communities.

In the first instance, emergency medical care is given by one of the highly skilled nurses in the area, but it is now possible to augment that care using modern technology. I strongly agree with Ross Finnie that we have only begun to scratch the surface of the opportunities offered by such developments as telemedicine and other information technology advances. It is possible, for example, to send faraway hospital specialists heart tracings or recordings of womb contractions for them to advise on. Videoconferencing is an obvious application, but all sorts of images can be sent by wire or radio, enabling specialist opinion to be sought. In time, nurses and paramedics can be trained to perform examinations under the guidance and advice of faraway consultants.

Such developments not only improve the quality of service but eventually save money as costly and inconvenient journeys to hospital are avoided. We are truly limited only by the power of our imagination. However, progress has been far too

slow—I was using such facilities in my urban practice 25 years ago.

One impediment to providing satisfactory care in rural areas is still the inadequacy of ambulance services—Mary Scanlon and others are right to highlight that. Steps are being taken to improve the efficiency of the service by prioritising calls, abolishing inappropriate single manning, increasing the number of trained paramedics and using satellite navigation equipment that will ultimately link up with NHS 24 or specialist services. There is also the development of ambulances based on the Volkswagen four-by-four vehicle, which will be more suited to use on Highland roads than the ambulances in service today.

More can be done—I know that, for example, one community is still scratching for money to buy landing lights for the emergency helicopter—but progress is being made.

The lesson—the thread that is constantly present—is to jettison old preconceptions and to look at the health needs of rural communities through fresh eyes, always heeding the opinions of the service users. I am delighted that the cabinet secretary is doing just that, building on the work done by the previous Government, in the Kerr report and, more recently, in the excellent report, “Delivering for Remote and Rural Healthcare”. At long last, the rural health service is getting the special attention that it needs and deserves.

10:34

George Foulkes (Lothians) (Lab): Presiding Officer, you will be pleased to hear that I will make a contribution somewhat different from my usual one. As you know, I am usually only too pleased to put one side of a debate—sometimes strongly—and occasionally even to attack the Scottish National Party Government. There is no shortage of subjects on which to do that—I am reverting to type. Nationally, there is a catalogue of broken promises and locally there is the reality of the council tax freeze coming into play in Edinburgh and causing cuts.

Unusually, however, I can see both sides of the argument around remote and rural health care. Being able to do that is a very dangerous condition, by the way. As members know, in another place I represented South Ayrshire, a large rural area of 800 square miles, so I am conscious of the problems of remoteness and rurality. That is why I opposed the closure of Ayr hospital accident and emergency unit, as previous Labour ministers will have cause to remember. I am aware of the problems of out-of-hours cover, ambulance response times, and of maintaining a

full range of services. The Arbuthnott formula was very popular when I was in Ayrshire.

Now that I represent the Lothians in the Scottish Parliament, I am equally aware of the needs of teaching hospitals and of the need to provide centres of excellence. Indeed, I found out how important that is when my wife was taken to the Southern general hospital recently with a brain haemorrhage, so I have reason to be very grateful for that excellent service.

I see the arguments on both sides, but surely the problem is that the cabinet secretary's claim that there will be no cuts is not absolutely correct. Of course, there will be no cuts in cash terms, but that does not take account of inflation, innovations in the health service and demographic change, with the increasing numbers of elderly people. Surely it would be easier to provide the right kind of money, using whatever formula, for all health boards in Scotland through increases such as those that are being given in England.

I have a couple of specific and, I hope, non-contentious points to raise. The Audit Committee carried out a thorough investigation of Western Isles NHS Board, as Murdo Fraser, deputy convener of the committee, will agree. As my colleague Margaret Curran said, there were real concerns about mismanagement, appointments and the lack of transparency. It all happened under a previous Administration, but it was caused by officials, and I hope that the cabinet secretary will consider that. The report also says that it was not all the fault of Western Isles NHS Board. Some of its problems occurred because of the lack of supervision from central Government in Edinburgh. When she is considering the accumulated deficit of £3.3 million, I hope that the cabinet secretary will take account of that fact. Western Isles NHS Board is one of our most remote and rural health boards, and to expect it to be able to pay that deficit off on its own while keeping all its services going is to place it under a huge burden.

Dr Simpson: Does the member agree that the fact that Western Isles NHS Board will have a reduction in its budget—

Nicola Sturgeon: That is not true.

Dr Simpson: Under NRAC, the health board will eventually receive £7 million less of adjusted money.

Nicola Sturgeon: That is outrageous.

Dr Simpson: The point is that, relatively, that will be an additional burden. I apologise to Mr Foulkes.

George Foulkes: I was getting a bit worried; I thought that someone else had taken over my speech.

Nicola Sturgeon: Mr Foulkes's speech is much better.

George Foulkes: I thank the cabinet secretary very much, but I hope that she will also take account of what Richard Simpson said.

The Audit Committee also looked at the 999 service, and suggested that the Government should consider a non-emergency service because more than 80 per cent of 999 calls are not emergencies. We got a long explanation from an official, who took hours and hours and hours to explain why a non-emergency call number could not be provided. If he and his colleagues had put that time into considering the possibility, we could have had a non-emergency service.

I agree with Ian McKee and Ross Finnie on telemedicine. I read about it in a report, and saw it operating in Arran. Five years ago, problems in Arran were being diagnosed in Ayr. Surely more can be done about it now.

On democracy in the health service, the cabinet secretary has spoken about having separate elections to health boards. That will cause great difficulty. I do not think that we will get the turnout or the required interest. Many decades ago, when I was a councillor, councils had health committees to deal with public health issues. We ought to involve elected councillors more in the running of the health service.

Although I can see both sides of the argument, it will come as no surprise to the cabinet secretary that I will support the Labour amendment. I hope that, once Mary Scanlon has heard all the arguments, she and her colleagues will, too.

10:40

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): Following a member for the Lothians might allow me to demonstrate the reality of the differentials in the cost of rural health provision. Audit Scotland carried out an assessment of the cost of out-of-hours primary care services. In NHS Borders it was £17.73 per person and in NHS Lothian it was £9.66. NHS Borders is no less efficient in providing services than NHS Lothian, but costs are higher because of distances travelled and the other, different pressures on rural areas.

That is why I am pleased that the Government will support the Liberal Democrat amendment. There are significant concerns about the impact of the funding formula that will now be used, from health boards in the Borders and right across rural Scotland, so I welcome the fact that the Government will review it. I hope that it will do that urgently and that the standing committee will

conduct its review of the funding formula before the end of the autumn.

Margaret Curran: I recognise the substance of the member's arguments about the standing committee, but if it does not resolve the issue, is there not an argument that the Parliament should discuss NRAC and its impact on services? The standing committee might not resolve Mr Purvis's concerns as a representative of the Borders.

Jeremy Purvis: I agree absolutely and will come on to talk about some of those points.

In November, NHS Borders warned the cabinet secretary that, if they were implemented in full, the NRAC proposals would result in a considerable reduction of the funds available. In a letter to the cabinet secretary, the chair of NHS Borders said:

"If implemented, the effect within NHS Borders would be an inevitable, but very controversial, concentration of resources into the Borders General Hospital and away from primary and community care services."

On the Government's policy of equality of provision across Scotland, but in the context of the NRAC recommendations, the chair of NHS Borders went on to say:

"NHS Borders would like to understand how this recommendation will be reconciled with this policy commitment as we believe the impact will be to increase health inequalities in rural areas in terms of access and, over time, in terms of outcomes."

Nicola Sturgeon: I appreciate Jeremy Purvis's interest in the subject; he is one of the few members in the Parliament who understands NRAC. Does he accept, however, that the key phrase in his quotation was "If implemented", and that the Government plans to ensure that it will not affect health boards in that way?

Jeremy Purvis: I understand the cabinet secretary's point and will come to it in a moment, but I disagree with her.

The letter from NHS Borders went on to highlight some of the flaws in NRAC:

"Without such an open approach, the members of NRAC will have been presented with a series of technical analyses that may prove one individual aspect of a formula as being reasonable in isolation. It is only when the impact of all analyses are taken together that the broader implications can be appreciated and assessed."

The impact on the Borders will be the developing differential of an £11.7 million reduction in the budget that was available to NHS Borders under the old scheme, but will not be available to it under the new scheme.

The Government has implemented NRAC's recommendations in full and has not phased them in, because NHS Borders will feel an impact this year. As the cabinet secretary is aware, only boards that both benefited from the previous

Arbuthnott formula and would be net beneficiaries under the new formula received an uplift this financial year. That is why, this year, NHS Borders received zero. Over the past four years, its annual average uplift has been £1.7 million; however, over the next four years, the uplift will be zero.

I acknowledge the cabinet secretary's willingness to discuss those issues and was pleased to meet her to do so. However, she is well aware from those discussions that, with regard to health board funding, the differential in the formula's fourth criterion, which replaces the rural weighting, is so perverse that population growth in the Borders will have to be significant to ensure parity. I was alarmed to find that her officials had not studied the registrar general for Scotland's figures for the area's population growth, which is expected to be 15.6 per cent over the next 25 years. That means that, for NHS Borders to reach parity under the NRAC formula, it will in the next 10 years need to find an extra 8,000 patients—for whom, of course, there will be no additional uplift. Such a situation is absolutely unsustainable.

This year, as a result of £3 million in cuts—part of a £10 million programme of cuts that have to be made over the next three years—stroke and palliative care wards in Borders general hospital have been amalgamated until December and 10 community beds have been withdrawn from Peebles hospital. Last week, GPs in the town told me that five patients were waiting for admission to a community rehabilitation bed.

I agree with Rob Gibson that we need long-term solutions to these problems, but this particular situation requires urgent Government intervention. Although there should certainly be a review of NRAC's impact on rural areas, the funding of NHS Borders must be reviewed right away.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): I call Dave Thompson, to be followed by John Lamont.

10:46

Dave Thompson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I congratulate the cabinet secretary on her commitment to remote and rural health care. It was certainly demonstrated in her recent visit to Wester Ross, which is about as remote as one can get on the Scottish mainland. I am sure that her little holiday up north revitalised her, especially as we put on excellent weather for the visit and plied her with traditional Highland hospitality and copious cups of tea and scones.

Of course, the visit was far from a holiday. The cabinet secretary started at 8 am in Inverness and travelled over 270 miles on the Highlands' long and winding roads before returning to Inverness at 7 pm for a visit to the Scottish Ambulance

Service's emergency medical dispatch centre and NHS 24. I think that the trip gave her a flavour of what the situation is like day in, day out for people in remote and rural areas.

Organised by the Wester Ross medical practice community representatives out-of-hours group, which is led by the redoubtable Liz Pritchard, the trip took in visits to the Howard Doris centre in Lochcarron, the health centre and Strathburn house in Gairloch and Coigach community centre, as well as a chat with the Achiltibuie first responders team. Such a hands-on visit to a very remote area obviously worked wonders on the cabinet secretary. The very next day, in Aviemore, she announced that she had accepted the recommendations of the remote and rural steering group report, which would give a secure future to rural hospitals.

In that welcome announcement, we were told that six Highlands and Islands rural general hospitals—the Gilbert Bain hospital in Lerwick, the Balfour hospital in Kirkwall, the Western Isles hospital in Stornoway, Caithness general hospital in Wick, the Belford hospital in Fort William and the Lorn and Islands district general hospital in Oban—would provide an enhanced range of services that will secure their future and provide more specialised local health care. As the cabinet secretary has made clear, they will now provide at least minimum core services, including out-patient, day-case, in-patient and rehabilitation services; nurse-led care for urgent cases; initial management of broken bones; routine and emergency surgery; management of acute medical conditions; management of patients who have suffered a stroke; management of long-term conditions; midwife-led maternity care; and the management of patients with more complicated problems before their transfer.

On top of all that, there is more good news. Other local and community hospitals in remote and rural areas will also offer more services, including out-patient clinics, day-case treatment, midwifery services and treatment for minor injuries and emergencies.

The Government will also extend community care teams based in GP practices. Such a move will improve integration and communication by bringing together GPs, community health nurses, midwives, allied health professionals, social care staff and the voluntary sector.

In August, a new pilot project will introduce into our remote and rural communities a new type of doctor who will be able to divide their time between their GP surgery and their local rural general hospital and combine the skills of a general practitioner with specialist training in acute medicine. That is fantastic stuff and exactly what everyone expects of a go-ahead, positive SNP

Government that puts people first and delivers on its promises.

But members should not take my word for it. The British Medical Association has welcomed your Scottish Government's recognition that rural health care needs to be viewed in a completely different way from the provision of urban health care services.

Jeremy Purvis: When my constituents ask me about the cuts in stroke and palliative care provision at the Borders general hospital and other cuts at Hay Lodge hospital, do I tell them that they are being carried out by your health board or your Government?

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): It is my Government, but I do not think that that is quite what Mr Purvis was referring to.

Dave Thompson: Your Scottish Government—the Scottish Government—is introducing all these improvements. Instead of spreading doom and gloom, the member should encourage the Government to continue to improve health services.

As members have already pointed out, another boon for people in remote areas is the announcement that the emergency medical retrieval service, which has been provided by consultants on a voluntary basis, will be extended. The service has been so successful that your Scottish Government has provided £1.5 million for an 18-month pilot, which began on Monday.

As the cabinet secretary has made clear, that move means that patients on the west coast who have life-threatening illnesses or injuries will now have access to the previously limited emergency medical retrieval service, which will now serve everyone from Stranraer to Stornoway and will cover five health boards with three rural general hospitals, 13 community hospitals and numerous isolated practices. This unique and innovative Scottish flying doctor service involves consultants from NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde working in close co-operation with the Scottish Ambulance Service and rural health boards.

That is all on top of the fact that people in remote and rural areas have benefited not only from the extra £97 million that has been committed to phase out prescription charges and ensure that sick people are not financially disadvantaged but from the extra 19 per cent that will be added to the health and wellbeing budget by 2010-11.

Our Government—mine and yours—is delivering and you should all be proud of it.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call David Whitton, to be followed by John Lamont.

10:53

David Whitton (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab): I thought that it was the other way round, Presiding Officer. Do you want to change the order, or shall I just carry on?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You have started so well. Please carry on.

David Whitton: Okay. I've started so I'll finish.

I welcome the opportunity to take part in the debate and will support Margaret Curran's amendment. Like Murdo Fraser, I will use my speech to comment on a constituency matter.

Unlikely as it might seem, remote and rural health care issues are extremely pertinent in parts of my constituency of Strathkelvin and Bearsden, which, like other Scottish constituencies, is a mix of urban and rural areas. This morning, I will focus on its rural areas, particularly the village of Twechar.

A former mining community, Twechar lies almost equidistant between the larger towns of Kirkintilloch in East Dunbartonshire and Kilsyth in North Lanarkshire. Classified as an area of multiple deprivation, it suffers from many of the associated problems such as poor housing, poor transport links and poor health.

In the past, the village's residents were served by a satellite GP service that was provided on a part-time basis from a surgery in Kirkintilloch. However, a few years ago, that service stopped when the GP who provided it moved away, and her patients had to choose whether to register with doctors in either Kirkintilloch or Kilsyth.

As we have heard, rural communities such as Twechar generally face poorer access to health care services. For example, primary care GP services and community health teams are likely to be located at some distance from home. Patients have limited or no choice as to whom they see for treatment, and may be offered a more limited range of services.

Many of Twechar's population of just over 2,000 are elderly or were previously employed in the mining industry and have health problems that are associated with that industry. As we know, older people frequently live on a limited income or pension, often do not have their own car and might well be infirm or in poor health. They do not have the option of walking to an appointment with a health care professional and public transport might be severely limited. Opportunities for women with young children to obtain child care for other youngsters while they attend an appointment might be limited or non-existent and they, too, might have no access to a car. People who have disabilities are similarly affected. That is why the SNP's decision to freeze the bus service operators

grant and end the rural transport fund is a mistake, as it leaves villages such as Twechar vulnerable to the possibility of losing vital bus links. However, that is another debate for another day.

In 2005, the Twechar regeneration group successfully secured a capital grant of £100,000 from Greater Glasgow NHS Board for the conversion and refurbishment of the former recreation centre, which was relaunched as the healthy living and enterprise centre. The new centre, which was visited by the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth last year, provides the residents of Twechar with access to a range of community health services, such as a pharmacy, smoking cessation classes, parenting programmes and health improvement work with young people. However, there is still no GP service.

Getting the pharmacy to locate in the centre was a major boost because, prior to the centre's launch, there was no pharmacy in the village. Local residents had no alternative but to travel outside the village to collect regular medication. Over the past year, a number of Twechar residents have contacted me about the lack of a GP service and the possibility of reinstating the satellite service in the new centre, close to the pharmacy. I was informed by the local community health partnership that a health survey had been conducted last year, which found that there was no call for a GP practice in the village. However, I have since conducted my own survey of residents and was not surprised to discover that a significant majority of them would like a GP service to return to the village, even if it would be provided only once or twice a week.

On page 16, "Delivering for Remote and Rural Healthcare" states that access to health care should be as local as possible. In her speech, the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing repeated that people should have equal access to the NHS and that that access should be as local as possible. Nicola Sturgeon and I really must get out of the habit of agreeing with each other.

The BMA has identified recruitment and retention of doctors in rural areas as a significant challenge but, for now, the residents of Twechar are being denied basic health care provision in their own village. As with so many other villages that are reasonably close to urban areas but which are still defined as remote, the problem is persuading the local GP to get out and about in the community that they serve. Happily, the one GP practice that I have contacted would be happy to hold a weekly surgery in Twechar, if it can get the go-ahead from the health board and the community health partnership. That is the next stage of the campaign, which I hope the cabinet

secretary and the Minister for Public Health will support.

As we have heard, around a million people in Scotland—a fifth of our population—live in rural areas. Some of them have very good health care provision, but many do not. In last night's members' business debate, we celebrated the 60th anniversary of the national health service. The fact that the NHS is a patient-centred service means that people in rural areas deserve the same consideration as town and city dwellers. That is why I had hoped that the cabinet secretary would accept the Labour amendment in the spirit in which it was lodged.

10:58

John Lamont (Roxburgh and Berwickshire)

(Con): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak on such an important topic. It is crucial that we provide health care services to people in every part of Scotland, not just to those who live in the urban central belt, so it is right that we are debating the needs of rural health services in Scotland.

I believe—as I am sure most members do—that quality health care is one of the most basic services that a nation can provide. Governments, especially the most recent Scottish Executive, have failed to provide many people who live in remote and rural communities with the same quality of health care that is delivered to people in urban areas. That must change. My constituency in the Scottish Borders is an area where health services have come under severe pressure, and I will again bring some of the issues to the attention of the Parliament and the Government.

The recent announcement of the closure of ward 14 at Borders general hospital has come as a shock to patients, staff and constituents alike. Although Borders general hospital is not in my constituency, it is an important resource that provides a valuable service to a large number of my constituents.

On top of that news, we have been told that there will be a reduction in bed capacity in the local community hospitals. It was announced only last month that there will be summer cuts of four beds at each community hospital in my constituency, which will be implemented in the coming weeks. Yesterday, I spent time with a senior Hawick doctor who has responsibility for Hawick community hospital, so I know that there is widespread concern among staff about how quickly the decision has been taken and about the lack of consultation.

There is a concern that, without the additional beds, the professionals will not have the flexibility to decide which patients need hospital treatment.

In effect, there will be a waiting list for available beds at the community hospitals. The health board wants more patients to be treated at home but, as any doctor will say, that is not always practical or feasible for patients.

I will tell Parliament of the scenario that the Hawick doctor described to me yesterday. Let us imagine the case of a very elderly patient in Hawick who is in her dying days. Nothing more can be done to help her other than to make her last days as comfortable as possible. She has lived in the town all her life and her final wish is to die in the town where she was born with her family around her. It will simply not be an option for her to go to Borders general hospital, which is 20 miles away. I am told by the doctors and professionals that the proposed bed cuts will mean that such patients might well have to wait two or three weeks to get the bed that they need for their last days. Unfortunately for the lady in question, time is against her and she does not have two or three weeks to wait.

Staff are also concerned that, although the proposed service reductions are described as short-term summer cuts, on numerous occasions in the past short-term cuts have turned into permanent measures. They no longer believe what they are told. Who would blame them, when it transpires that the summer cuts will continue until December? Since when has December been a summer month in Scotland?

Parliament should be aware that those cuts come on the back of a number of hospital closures in the Borders. Thanks to the health policies of the previous Government, we lost Jedburgh and Coldstream hospitals, together with 40 other community hospitals across Scotland. Even though they received overwhelming support from their local communities, the Minister for Health and Community Care, Andy Kerr, and the Liberal-Labour Administration failed to support them and allowed them to be closed, so I find Mr Purvis's crocodile tears, which he has shed both in the debate and in the local press, a little rich, given his Government's record on rural health services in the Borders.

Jeremy Purvis: I understand why the member makes that political point; he is fully entitled to do so. I opposed those closures, as did Mr Lamont's predecessor. Whether we are talking about wrong decisions by Borders NHS Board or by a Government, it is incumbent on all of us who represent the Borders to ensure that, in the long term, the funding formula does not disadvantage any of our constituents.

John Lamont: It is perhaps a reflection of how little influence the Liberal Democrats had on the previous Administration that, despite the fact that

they claimed to object to those closures, they were unable to reverse the decision.

Instead of hospital cuts, I could have focused on the chronic shortage of NHS dentists in my constituency. Only 17 per cent of adults in Roxburgh and Berwickshire are registered with an NHS dentist. What an astonishing figure! Although the opening of new facilities in Coldstream and Hawick in the coming months will result in improvements to the dental care system in the Borders, accessibility remains a significant issue. Patients who do not have a car face a bus journey of several hours to get to the new dentists. I look forward to hearing from the minister how the Government intends to improve accessibility to dental care in the Borders and other rural areas.

The debate has been essential, as people's inability to access health care services in remote and rural parts of Scotland and the lack of health care services in those areas are an issue of growing importance. Access to health care in remote and rural areas is becoming more of a problem. As I have demonstrated, the closure of community hospitals and wards is making it more difficult for the people of Scotland to receive the health care that they need. It is imperative that we keep local health care local and that the people of Scotland have access to health care, regardless of where they live. Improvements must be made to our remote and rural health care services. The mistakes that were made by the previous Liberal-Labour Administration must not be repeated.

11:04

Nigel Don (North East Scotland) (SNP): I will begin by taking the opportunity to correct what I said on 22 May, when we debated the ambulance service in remote areas. I quite incorrectly said that the ambulance service in Braemar had been moved to Aboyne when, in fact, it has been moved to Ballater. I was well aware of that; I simply made a mistake. I apologise. That does not change the thrust of my argument, but it means that what I said was factually wrong.

As is usual at the end of a debate, I will pick up on issues that other members have not picked up on, starting with demographic change. Someone pointed out that our rural communities are getting older, which is partly because more older folk are choosing to stay in rural communities and they are living longer, but also because there is still, to an extent, the historically inevitable movement of younger folk to the cities for employment and training, and the tendency for them not to return. That brings me to a central point that I do not think that anybody has mentioned. Whatever we and the Government are doing now, we need to remember that it will be different in five years, and different again in 10 years. We must therefore

have mechanisms that allow us to continue to look ahead rather than rest on where we have got to.

We have talked briefly in the debate about telemedicine, and I would not dream of telling doctors how they can do that. However, as a layman, I am conscious that I have access to a computer and the internet and that we are moving to the point where many folk in rural communities will have access to the internet. If they do not have access, their neighbours may well have it. I wonder, therefore, whether we need to look ahead and consider whether contact with the health service could be made in the first instance through the internet. For example, if someone's bairn was crying at 2 o'clock in the morning and they did not know what to do about it, why on earth could they not switch on to something called, say, nhshelp.com and say, "Hey, guys, what do I do with this?" That would be swift, reassuring and cost effective, and it would surely eliminate many problems the following day. I encourage the health service to look further ahead from what we can do now.

In preparation for the debate, I spoke to some rural GPs. I asked them generally what they thought about the situation. As members can imagine, they told me many things that, frankly, I do not have time to pass on. However, I asked them clearly what their top priority was and what the biggest issue affecting them was. The common theme was transport. It is not all about ambulances, although that issue has been well rehearsed; it is also about buses and the long miles between places. In that context, I urge folk to think about how they build their transport models and to recognise that, although we sometimes want the patient to go to the health professional, it is sometimes better for the health professional to go to the patient. I encourage folk to think outside the box of specialties and all that kind of stuff, which the health service naturally thinks about because that is its stock in trade. I want the health service to engage more with the model of thinking that says, "Where do these people need to be? What is the best way of getting good contact time between patient and professional?" I want the health service to acknowledge that travel times are inevitably involved in that, and to consider whether the right person is doing the travelling at the right time.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We now move to the winding-up speeches.

11:08

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): Representing the constituency that I do, I warmly welcome the cabinet secretary's comments about people having equal access no matter where they live. In the past, I have

expressed my constituents' worries about the actuality of access, which was rather different.

It was good that the cabinet secretary talked in Aviemore some days ago about securing the future of our community hospitals—we all welcomed that. However, I jumped the height of myself when she talked about midwife-led maternity services, and I wrote to her within minutes. However, I have received an assurance from NHS Highland that it still intends to maintain the consultant-led service in Caithness general hospital, and I take at face value the Minister for Public Health's statement that that is the case. Enormous anguish and anxiety were caused by the previous proposal to downgrade the maternity service in Caithness. Members will remember me and others getting on our feet many times about that issue. We must never revisit that proposal, and we must never contemplate stepping back from the high level of service that is crucial to my constituents and me.

Margaret Curran referred to NHS representation. Before the appointment of Colin Punler to Highland NHS Board, the far north of Scotland lost out on representation on that board. That issue has been addressed, but the previous lack of representation brought us to a dreadful impasse for the maternity service. Now that we have representation for the north, I believe that things are much better. However, we must always be vigilant in ensuring that the membership of not only Highland NHS Board but other large rural boards has sufficient geographic coverage.

I could not let this speech go by without saying something about ambulance services. I welcome the commitment that the cabinet secretary gave yesterday to get right into the issue. I echo two pleas that I made yesterday. First, could the cabinet secretary's officials please talk to the GPs on the ground, who know better than anyone what the situation is? They have told me, for example, about the terrible situation of the GP having to leave the north coast and travel down to Raigmore hospital with a patient because there was no second man in an ambulance. What would have happened if someone in Tongue or Bettyhill had had a heart attack during that time? However, I take at face value what the cabinet secretary said, and I welcome her turning over the stones to see what has been going on. My second plea is for part-time working to be looked at because I believe that it is a considerable disincentive to recruitment.

I intervened earlier to make a point about the interrelatedness of the good intention of what the cabinet secretary has told us today and the difficulties to which working together with, for example, the social work department in Highland Council can lead, as other members have said.

Rhoda Grant mentioned the Howard Doris centre, which is named after the company that built the mighty Ninian Central platform. We in the north are led to believe that Highland Council faces social work budget cuts of approximately £400,000. There is no doubt that that will undermine the good work that is being done in another department.

The future of the Assynt centre was mentioned. It is a respite centre for the elderly whose availability was downgraded some time ago from seven days a week to five. There was talk of upgrading it again to seven, so that old people in Assynt in west Sutherland could stay in the place where they were brought up, which they love so well. There is no talk of taking it back to seven days now, but I have written continually about that. We must always be vigilant in ensuring that difficulties in Highland Council's funding do not undermine best intentions for the health dimension.

Mention was also made of the difficulty in the recruitment and retention of workforces. That was outlined to me on a recent visit to the Lochshell dental clinic in Wick as one of the challenges that the clinic faces. I know that the same challenge is faced in the constituencies of other members.

Dave Thompson: I am sure that the member will accept that Highland Council is doing a great job in replacing five of its residential care homes from within the current budget.

Jamie Stone: That is a smokescreen that cannot hide the fact that the Assynt centre has not been upgraded and that old people are being forced to move away from the area that they love so well. I sincerely hope that there is no threat to the future of the Caladh Sona facility on the north coast.

What is being delivered in Lochshell is good news for the cabinet secretary because it is cutting edge and it is addressing some of the huge problems that we face in the north of Scotland regarding lack of access to NHS dental services. However, I give credit where it is due. On my visit to Lochshell, I was accompanied by Garry Coutts, the chairman of the health board. It is true that a dent is being made in the huge number of people who need dental services, but that is happening against the backdrop of a big problem. I believe that the Lochshell dental clinic is an example that could be replicated in other parts of rural Scotland. With the best of intentions, I cordially invite either the cabinet secretary or the minister to come and visit it as soon as possible. I think that they will be pleased by what they see, which I believe is a step forward.

I have two final points. First, mention has been made of patient delivery. If a private citizen in the

Highland area delivers somebody to a hospital for treatment in a car that is up to 1500cc, they get 30.5p a mile; if the car is over 1500cc, they get 36.9p a mile. That may seem a lot, but a gallon of diesel in Durness costs £1.45—sorry, I mean a litre of diesel; I wish it was a gallon. Members can see that the mileage remuneration is being eaten into. The rising price of oil is not the fault of the Scottish Government, but it is having a devastating effect on people who, out of the goodness of their hearts, deliver patients.

My final, brief point is that there must be confidence in the NHS 24 service if all its good intention is to be delivered. Recently I dealt with the case of Mr and Mrs Petrie at my Castletown clinic. Their child took ill and they were advised to put him in bed. Instead, they took him to hospital, where it turned out that he was diabetic. Members can imagine what might have happened had the parents not intervened. Confidence in the service is crucial.

11:15

Jackson Carlaw (West of Scotland) (Con):

This has been another long and worthwhile debate on a significant area of health policy. I say that somewhat wearily because, as others have observed, this is not the first worthwhile debate on a health topic in recent weeks, and I am sure that it will not be the last, because all manner of other initiatives for us to relish are pending. If talking about health were to make us healthier, I am sure that we would all be fit specimens, although when I look around the chamber and in the mirror, I see that that does not follow. I can only hope that a debate on anaesthetics is not planned for the immediate future.

None of what I have said makes today's debate any less important. As Mary Scanlon said earlier on our behalf, we support the conclusions of the remote and rural steering group report "Delivering for Remote and Rural Healthcare" and the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing's announcements. We also recognise the work of the previous Administration in preparing to tackle the challenge. Presiding Officer, perhaps you could issue hats to all members, as that would make it much easier for us to doff them to the previous Administration in the ritual act that we are required to perform.

The problems that the report seeks to address are fundamental but particular: higher suicide rates; a higher incidence of alcohol-related disease; a higher number of accidents, whether on the roads or through climbing, farming and fishing; a palliative care load that is higher than the urban equivalent; and the huge seasonal fluctuation of population. Rob Gibson spoke convincingly about the need for a flexible funding model.

As a visitor to the remote north and as something of a townie—although a fan of the countryside—I am struck by the sheer isolation of many communities and individuals there. It is quite a thought that in some places the population can be so low for much of the year. The consequential loneliness can have a particularly strong effect on the incidence of alcoholism and, tragically, suicide. We welcome the actions that are designed to improve mental health in such areas, as the unique lifestyle conditions that I have described can fuel the depression that often leads to tragedies, many of which we ought to be able to avoid.

As Mary Scanlon said, we welcome the cabinet secretary's acceptance that six hospitals should provide core services and her intentions for other local community hospitals.

I was encouraged by the fact that the cabinet secretary sees an opportunity to develop e-health, where appropriate, especially where it can obviate the need for long and unnecessary journeys. I listened with interest to the sensible comments of Ross Finnie and Rob Gibson on telemedicine. We welcome the emphasis that the cabinet secretary is placing on designing a solution that allows care to be delivered as near to home as possible and as safely as possible. In particular, we look forward to a successful outcome to the extended pilot in the west of Scotland.

It will be interesting to see what role directly elected health boards will play in rural communities, especially given the challenge of geography and the need to ensure that in any one health board—especially a rural one—the elected representatives do not all come from one street or community, as, in theory, they could.

Another emerging challenge is the consequences of the new NHS funding formula. I understand the cabinet secretary's position on the issue. She is essentially correct when she says that a more up-to-date funding method should be applied. However, having seen such arguments lost in politics and business before, I remind her of the old adage that perception is the truth, even if it is not the reality. Whatever she says today, the perception is growing and becoming entrenched that rural health boards face budget cuts—saying that they do not will not be enough. I give her fair warning that NRAC will need careful explanation—and soon—if the Government is to avoid finding itself unable to persuade a public who have reached a conclusion, however inaccurate it may be. It would not be wise for her to rely solely on the argument that people are scaremongering.

However, the cabinet secretary is right to caution the Labour Party against alarming and misleading the public, in its desperation to find a line of political attack, by being lurid rather than

factual. The longer Margaret Curran spoke this morning, the more she allowed herself to indulge in the lurid rather than the factual. The Liberal amendment offers a measured way forward and, on balance, we should listen to it.

Helen Eadie: Do Jackson Carlaw and the Conservatives accept that NRAC is a target and not an allocation?

Jackson Carlaw: Exactly. That is why the Liberal amendment, which proposes a resolution, is preferable to the Labour amendment, which simply identifies the issue. Margaret Curran's genuine concern about appointments in the Western Isles would carry more authority if occasionally the Labour Party accepted that the practice when it was in government could have been improved in some cases, or even one case.

It was good to listen to the speeches of rural members. John Lamont spoke movingly about the practical consequences of proposed service reductions in his constituency and raised the important issue of rural dental care. Christine Grahame spoke with particular reference to the board's proposals for bed cuts at Hay Lodge hospital. I should credit the member, as last week I saw her local paper and can confirm that, as she said, she was all over it fighting this battle.

Rhoda Grant made a fair point about the additional responsibilities of ambulance staff and the need for training and reward. There was a measured contribution from Helen Eadie, on which I congratulate her. George Foulkes, with the breadth of vision that is afforded by his career of so many hats, astonished us all by recognising so late in his political life—after decades of sitting in this chamber, the Commons, the Lords and his local council—that an argument can have two sides. It was a long wait, but it was worth while. Meanwhile, Dave Thompson enchanted us with the news that people in his community get to lie in until 8 o'clock in the morning and that their final activity is at 7 pm—nice work if you can get it. If ever I need a pair of rose-tinted spectacles, I will know where to go. Dave Whitton reminded us again of the 60th anniversary of the national health service. If I had stuck with the Labour Party after my early teens, I would burst with pride at what was undoubtedly its greatest achievement in government so long ago—what a pity that it has been all downhill for the Labour Party ever since.

We appreciate the cabinet secretary's support for the amendment in Mary Scanlon's name, which followed a detailed discussion yesterday. We will support the motion and the Liberal amendment.

11:21

Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): This has been a good debate. I start by

inviting the cabinet secretary to get through one debate without accusing the Opposition of scaremongering when it tries to make serious points.

Nicola Sturgeon: Will the member give way?

Dr Simpson: I want to make some progress. I will give way to the cabinet secretary later, but it would be helpful for her to drop the word "scaremongering".

We are having this debate because, as the cabinet secretary rightly said, it is important that people in remote and rural communities and everyone else have equal access to health care. The geography of Scotland is one reason for the Barnett formula, as we need additional funding to support necessary services in remote and rural areas. Members have referred to factors other than geography that are important. There are differences between the health needs of remote and rural areas and those of other areas. Jackson Carlaw mentioned higher suicide rates, a higher incidence of alcohol-related disease, a higher number of accidents and a higher palliative care load.

Five areas need to be addressed, but none of us has time to consider them in the necessary depth. Members have referred to recruitment and retention; education; the fact that organisational structures in remote and rural communities need to be different; ambulance and emergency care services; e-health; and the vexed question of NRAC. I propose to deal with as many of those issues as I can in the time that is available to me.

On recruitment and retention, no one has mentioned the little-understood term "proleptic appointments", to which the report refers. The issue is fundamental, as the situation in remote and rural areas is different from that in towns. We need to appoint people in advance of their taking up posts, to ensure that their induction is not brief and to recognise the peculiar needs of rural communities. In other words, there needs to be extended induction. That requires funding, because it is vital to appoint people three months ahead of time to prepare them. Ian McKee and others referred to the need for multiskill training. The day of generalist surgeons, who operated until recently throughout Scotland, has almost gone, so how do we prepare people for work in more remote and rural communities, where they will have to undertake more traditional roles? That needs to be addressed, and the report goes into the issue in considerable detail.

Multiskilling and multitasking are not just for groups such as general surgeons, but for all workers in remote and rural areas. The report does not emphasise sufficiently the need not only to provide the different skills that an extended

community care team requires but to make use of the different skills and aptitudes of individuals, which is especially necessary in remote and rural communities. People also need to be integrated and matched with facilities. A detailed set of management and human resources tools is required.

Another issue that has not been referred to is the role of volunteers. Volunteers are important throughout the health service, but their importance in rural communities is even greater. Jamie Stone and others referred to the problem of volunteer drivers; I am referring to other groups as well.

Some members referred to agenda for change and the European working time directive, which are particular issues in remote and rural communities. The directive makes providing out-of-hours care extremely difficult. On agenda for change, the peculiar skills of individuals need to be recognised, which is particularly difficult for those communities. The extended community care model that has been referred to builds community resilience, which is particularly important.

The need to integrate all services to provide good out-of-hours cover was illustrated extremely well by Murdo Fraser. The situation is difficult, now that GPs are no longer prepared to work 24 hours a day. Jeremy Purvis referred to the cost of the out-of-hours service in the Borders being twice the cost of that in NHS Lothian, but in the Highlands it is actually six or seven times the cost in Glasgow. There are huge differences.

The report refers to replacing fragmented services, different organisations, duplication and a mainly reactive service with one that is integrated and involves partnership, seamless delivery of care and anticipatory care. I will illustrate that briefly with the example of the Ambulance Service. The report states that, for some areas, further embedding that service within the territorial boards would seem to be appropriate. Mary Scanlon referred to that. The cabinet secretary and the Minister for Public Health should consider that carefully. The pilot in which paramedics provide anticipatory care reflects a need for a much stronger degree of embedding within the territorial boards than has happened hitherto.

In the report, we find that there are six different levels of nursing care and eight different levels of allied health professionals, all of which are assisted by support workers. I welcome that—it is appropriate for rural areas—but, as Mary Scanlon said, we need to consider carefully the terms and conditions of those workers.

The bit of the report on e-health is not as strong as I would like. A number of members, including Rob Gibson, Ross Finnie and Ian McKee, referred to the importance of e-health. The report appears

to stress the need for service-to-service connection. That is important for delivering diagnostic services in remote communities that are served by primary health care teams, linked to hubs. The report deals with that adequately. However, as Nigel Don referred to eloquently, the report does not deal with the concept of e-health as a tool for monitoring individuals in their homes. West Lothian has one of the leading examples of that in Europe. About 3,000 homes are monitored. We could develop that by monitoring bed pressure and movement, and, as one member suggested, by working with patients to provide online facilities. Northern Ireland has just announced £46 million for such an initiative. Our budget for that is considerably less. Nigel Don's concept was of a vision for the future. I understand the constraints, but the report is weak on e-health and it needs to be strengthened.

We may have difficulties with the detail of NRAC, but we must remember that Arbuthnott was set up by Labour and with the agreement of the Parliament, and was welcomed by everyone. However, it led to problems, for example in Grampian, where the allocation was cut. I remember Mike Rumbles's eloquence in the first session of the Parliament about that "terrible" cut. It is understood that some will be winners and some will be losers, but the concern is that the new system is less transparent and that, by using small areas to define the formula, it loses something that Arbuthnott had.

My final point is one that I made in the Health and Sport Committee. Primary care is fundamental to remote and rural areas, but it has not been considered. That was also a criticism of Arbuthnott. NRAC has admitted that it does not have the data to deal with the issue.

The cabinet secretary may be concerned about how Labour members are expressing themselves, but there is no doubt that there is concern about the cuts. We may argue about the figures, but we estimate that there will be cuts of about £12 million or £13 million for the Borders, over a period of time. Without a cut, costs will rise year on year, but, as George Foulkes said, the rises will not reflect the needs of communities. Labour makes an important suggestion about NRAC in its amendment. We are not scaremongering; we are inviting continued debate with NRAC. The Liberal amendment refers to that, too.

RARARI has done excellent work. I praise Paul Martin, Dr Gibbins and the 30 members of RARARI for their hard work, which comes on top of Lewis Ritchie's community care report. We have vital models, but we need to consider e-health and revisit NRAC from the point of view of its transparency.

11:31

The Minister for Public Health (Shona Robison): I thank the Parliament for the helpful and, in the main, constructive way in which it has debated the future of remote and rural health care. The report that stimulated the debate was produced by a working group that the previous Government established, and I am pleased that there continues to be a good deal of consensus among the parties and a shared determination to provide sustainable health care in our rural communities.

I shall deal with some of the issues that have been raised in the debate. Richard Simpson made a good point about the way that we express ourselves. Margaret Curran failed to say whether she would have supported NRAC's recommendations. She talked about interrogating the recommendations. I do not think that any member would believe that the cabinet secretary did anything other than interrogate the recommendations—of course she did. To be fair, Richard Simpson was far more reasonable in his approach to NRAC. The same goes for Ross Finnie, who made a constructive speech on a constructive amendment and demonstrated an understanding of the issues involved. To members such as Jeremy Purvis, John Lamont and Christine Grahame, who raised issues about NHS Borders, I say that NRAC will provide an opportunity for issues and detail to be discussed. I am pleased that members throughout the chamber have welcomed the setting up of that committee.

Jeremy Purvis: The Minister for Public Health will be aware of the urgency of the situation. Can she indicate when NRAC will consider health funding in rural areas?

Shona Robison: Work has already begun on setting up the group. The details will be announced shortly.

Margaret Curran talked about out-of-hours care. The expert group that will be established to consider the funding formula will be able to consider and make recommendations on issues such as the cost of providing out-of-hours services in remote and rural areas.

Margaret Curran: I refer to the earlier point about the change from Arbuthnott to NRAC. I would have interrogated the importance of house type in determining need and mortality. Perhaps the minister will explain that.

Shona Robison: All of those issues were interrogated by the cabinet secretary. Margaret Curran has failed to say what she would have done differently. That is the weakness in her argument. She knows as well as every other member that she, too, would have accepted NRAC's recommendations.

Mary Scanlon raised an issue about generic support workers. That role is being developed and evaluated by NHS Shetland, and is for communities that have no health or social care at present. I can assure the member that generic support workers will not, therefore, replace health visitors in any way, but they will provide essential care and support where no such support is currently available. We will ensure that members are kept informed of progress. Of course, the terms and conditions will be relevant to agenda for change, which I know Mary Scanlon is concerned about.

Rob Gibson made some important points about community involvement in designing models of care. We want communities to be very much involved in the development of their health care services.

Helen Eadie raised a number of points. I confirm that the funding for the national programme manager has been provided by the Scottish Government and that the programme manager is now in place. She also raised a constituency case. It is absolutely right and proper for members to raise constituency cases in the chamber—I have done so myself—but, when they do so, it is important that they get the facts correct. Helen Eadie asserted that she had not received a reply from the cabinet secretary after seven weeks. I say to her that the reply to her letter of 12 March was sent to her on 5 April. Helen Eadie must reflect on her comments in the light of that fact.

Helen Eadie: It was not a substantive reply; it was a holding reply, and, given that the case involves someone who is dealing with life-and-death issues, that is not acceptable. I had the constituent in my surgery on Monday night, and they were absolutely devastated, having had weeks of sleepless nights. They were really upset, really angry at the lack of care—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: This intervention is getting a bit long, Ms Eadie.

Shona Robison: The case involves important issues, and the board is taking them forward. I do not minimise the concerns that the case raises, but I stress that it is essential that members do not misrepresent the facts. The reply from the cabinet secretary, which I have with me, is a substantial letter that deals with some of the concerns that Helen Eadie raised. She should not have implied that there was a seven-week time lag in the reply, because that is not accurate.

Murdo Fraser raised a number of issues regarding highland Perthshire and Kinloch Rannoch, and I am aware of the similar issues that have been raised by the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth. As I said to Murdo Fraser, discussions will take place between

the Aberfeldy practice and the local community. However, I will respond to him in writing to address some of the detailed concerns that he raised.

Nigel Don raised a point that was, perhaps, not addressed as deeply in the debate as it should have been. The challenge of demographic changes must be met, and we need to look ahead in order to do so. He said that telemedicine and telecare had great potential in that regard, and I absolutely agree. At the moment, we are only touching the margins of the potential of telemedicine and telecare, and the particular relevance that they have for maintaining older people safely in their own homes. I saw some of that potential when I visited the Scottish centre for telehealth, and I think that, over the next few years, we will see the potential of such delivery mechanisms as they roll out.

The programme of action that we have outlined is designed to bring clarity about the services that people have a right to expect and to give people confidence that the services will be sustained. It is realistic about the challenges that the NHS faces in remote and rural areas, such as geography, demographic change, rural deprivation and attracting and retaining the best staff, with the skills that they need to meet the needs and expectations of patients, their families and their carers. The programme is also confident—confident about our ability to support the resilience of rural communities, to realise the benefits of new technologies and to work in new and different ways.

The proposals will boost the confidence of patients who live in remote and rural Scotland. We have set out a model of care that can be sustained over the longer term, removed the fear that the axe might drop on our rural general hospitals and turned our backs on the relentless drive towards the centralisation of vital health care services, which was, unfortunately, a hallmark of the previous Administration.

Question Time

SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

General Questions

11:40

St Margaret of Scotland Hospice

1. Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie)

(Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive whether the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing considers that the proposal by NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde for continuing care beds to be withdrawn from St Margaret of Scotland Hospice, Clydebank, with effect from April 2009, is in the best interests of patients or their relatives. (S3O-3645)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon): Scotland's health care challenges require a shift in the balance of care towards community-based services. For some people with particularly complex needs, that means ensuring the availability of the most appropriate services in the right setting with the best support. That is also important for families and carers. Organisations that provide services to the national health service need to do so in line with NHS strategic priorities.

NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde continues to work with the board of St Margaret's with regard to the services that could be provided as part of the overall model of care for the people whom the board serves, and they are due to meet again next week.

Des McNulty: In my part of the west of Scotland, it is well understood by those whose friends or relatives have needed continuing care that the best available care is in St Margaret's. Currently, geriatricians dealing with patients from Dunbartonshire and west Glasgow refer their patients with the most complex needs to St Margaret's, because they, too, are aware that that is where the best quality of care is available.

Why is the health board withdrawing from those patients the best service available, and what will the minister do to stop that?

Nicola Sturgeon: It is important to put on record a number of facts in relation to St Margaret's. First, Des McNulty is right to say that St Margaret's provides a valued service. I visited the hospice recently and was impressed by what I saw there.

Secondly, it is also important to record that there is no threat to the existence of St Margaret's, and that no change whatever is proposed to the palliative care services. The board of NHS Greater

Glasgow and Clyde is trying to ensure that the services that it commissions are aligned with the strategic priorities of the board.

The board has made two proposals to St Margaret's that would allow it to provide services that are in line with the provision that NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde needs to make to serve its population. As I said in my initial answer, dialogue is on-going between the NHS board and the board of St Margaret's, and they are due to meet again next week. I repeat what I have said before, which is that I expect that discussion to be constructive and I look forward to hearing the outcome of it.

Jackson Carlaw (West of Scotland) (Con):

The meter is running on the resolution of this issue. If public support is any measure, the cabinet secretary does not want to find herself downwind of the whirlwind that will follow if successful mediation is not brought to bear on the situation, which involves seemingly entrenched positions on both sides, particularly on the part of NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde. Whatever the cabinet secretary's reservations, I suggest that her direct intervention seems to be necessary.

Nicola Sturgeon: I have made it clear to the NHS board that it must engage in constructive dialogue with the board of St Margaret's, and I have encouraged the board of St Margaret's to do likewise. I do not believe that any member of this Parliament would seriously ask me to intervene to instruct an NHS board to commission services that it does not need to provide for its population. I have encouraged—and will continue to do so—the NHS board to find an alternative solution, with the board of St Margaret's, to allow St Margaret's to continue to provide high-quality services. That is the right way in which to proceed. I hope that next week's discussions will be constructive and will allow a solution to be found that is in the interests of the NHS board, the board of St Margaret's and, most important of all, the local population.

Health Services (Role of Private Sector)

2. Ross Finnie (West of Scotland) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it considers that the private sector has any role to play in the delivery of health services. (S3O-3659)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon): I have made it clear that the Scottish Government will invest in the national health service in Scotland to ensure that patients get rapid access to high-quality care. We have no intention of investing in or expanding the private health care sector, but—as I have said repeatedly in the past—NHS boards are free to make use of independent sector hospitals if it helps them to address short-term capacity issues and to ensure that NHS patients are treated quickly.

Ross Finnie: In asking a question of that nature, I seek serious clarity from the cabinet secretary. The press release regarding her address to a conference in London in June 2007 made it clear that the Scottish Government was signalling an end to future partnerships between the NHS and the private sector. However, in response to the announcement of the collaboration between NHS Lothian and the Royal Bank of Scotland, the cabinet secretary was quoted as saying:

"This partnership between NHS Lothian and RBS will offer real benefits to patients throughout Scotland".

We have previously heard the cabinet secretary's ambivalence with regard to the partnership that exists in relation to the services that are provided at Stracathro hospital. Will she clarify precisely where she stands on the matter?

Nicola Sturgeon: I am a great admirer of Ross Finnie's attention to detail and the fact that he is a stickler for clarity. Other members in the chamber could learn a lot from his approach to such matters. For that reason, I am sure that if he goes back and reads all my previous pronouncements on the matter, he will find that they are absolutely crystal clear.

The point about the situation between NHS Lothian and the RBS is important. I have said repeatedly, and I will say again, that I will not allow taxpayers' money to be invested in capacity in the independent sector at the expense of the NHS. The partnership, as Ross Finnie put it, between NHS Lothian and the Royal Bank of Scotland will make a state-of-the-art scanner available to the population of the Lothians without the expenditure of one penny of NHS resources. That is the kind of partnership that we should encourage, as I hope Ross Finnie will.

Ian McKee (Lothians) (SNP): Does the cabinet secretary agree that donations from the private sector to the NHS, such as the one that was mentioned in the previous question, should be encouraged—indeed, not only encouraged but regulated in such a way that they benefit the common good?

Nicola Sturgeon: Ian McKee will recall the answer that I gave to Margo MacDonald in the chamber last week, in which I said that it was right that we examine the ground rules for such donations to ensure transparency and public confidence.

I repeat that the situation between the RBS and NHS Lothian—and, indeed, the University of Edinburgh—is a win-win-win situation. The RBS needed only 25 per cent of the capacity of the state-of-the-art scanner that it intended to purchase for the benefit of its staff, and it is therefore donating the additional 75 per cent for

research and for the benefit of NHS patients. I hope that all members agree that that is a far better outcome than having 75 per cent of one of the world's best pieces of equipment lying idle.

Andy Kerr (East Kilbride) (Lab): I thank the cabinet secretary for her clarification of the Scottish National Party policy on health services, which differs very little from that of the previous Government. Will she clarify that position in relation to John Swinney's statement to the chamber last week, in which he set out a clear role for the public and private sectors in our public services? I presume that that includes health.

Nicola Sturgeon: I am glad that the penny is dropping for even the hard of understanding in the chamber. Even Andy Kerr now understands SNP policy, which is to safeguard the public nature of our national health service rather than to preside over the creeping privatisation for which he was renowned.

I am sure that Andy Kerr will be delighted to join me—

Andy Kerr: Explain it, then.

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): Order.

Nicola Sturgeon: I am sure that he will be delighted to join me in welcoming the fact that, after years and years of private finance initiative hospitals that were sanctioned by the Government of which he was a part, one of the early acts of this Government was to announce the redevelopment of the Southern general. That hospital will be funded entirely within the public sector. I am sure that even Andy Kerr, who is not known for his grace, will manage to welcome that.

Probationary Teachers (Employment)

3. Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what action it is taking to secure employment for probationary teachers coming to the end of their induction year. (S3O-3641)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Fiona Hyslop): Local authorities are responsible for the employment of teachers. We have provided a record funding settlement of £34.9 billion over the spending review period. Under the terms of the concordat, we have agreed specific arrangements and sufficient funds for local authorities to maintain teacher numbers at the 2007 level against a backdrop of falling school rolls. Those arrangements will provide increasing opportunities for probationer teachers to find employment. In addition, approximately 6,000 teachers are expected to leave teaching this year, mostly for retirement reasons. That is almost 400 more than

the number who left last year, which therefore creates vacancies for new teachers.

Ken Macintosh: I thank the cabinet secretary for her answer, which was more a description of the current state of affairs than an answer to the question about what action she is taking. Is she aware of the hundreds of letters that are coming into constituency offices from the 3,500 teachers who are reaching the end of their induction year and face with apprehension the prospect of not finding a job?

Why has the cabinet secretary not sat down with local authorities, teachers and others in a national body to take action, as she has been urged to do for the best part of the past year? Does she consider it acceptable to recruit more and more people into teacher training while cutting education budgets up and down the country so that those people have no jobs to go into?

Fiona Hyslop: There are 300 more jobs in teaching under this Government compared with the number that the previous Government provided. The General Teaching Council for Scotland's employment survey shows that 92.7 per cent of last year's probationers are in teaching employment.

I have established a teacher employment working group, in which the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities is a key player; local authorities are employers and have key responsibilities. I am pleased to announce that Joe Di Paola, the head of the employers organisation within COSLA, will take the lead role in that group. The group's remit is to assess whether the current teacher workforce planning process that was inherited from the previous Government is fit for purpose, taking into account relevant policy developments; to examine whether improvements can be made to maximise the compatibility between student numbers and employment opportunities for teachers; to consider the impact of the teacher induction scheme; and to make recommendations for improvements in the process. That reflection will be welcome, and I hope that it will be warmly welcomed by all members in the chamber.

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing must have been referring to her education colleague when she said that some members could learn from Ross Finnie's eye for detail. I ask the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning to be crystal clear on one point with regard to the working group's remit. Will the working group consider the teacher profile that is needed to implement the SNP Government's promise on class sizes, or will it fudge the issue, as the Government has done since it came to office?

Fiona Hyslop: I reiterate that the Government has provided specific arrangements and funding to maintain teacher numbers at the 2007 level. Providing resources to maintain teacher numbers at 53,000 is a very positive step. The teacher employment working group will examine the implementation and the interface with local authority workforce planning systems to ensure that they are compatible. It will consider the implications of new policy drivers such as the Government's desire to drive down class sizes at early primary level, and whether the system of allocating probationer teachers needs to be adjusted to take account of developments over the past year, using new demographic data. I am pleased that the GTC will also be a member of the teacher employment working group.

Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): Answer the question.

The Presiding Officer: Mr Rumbles, I ask you not to come into the chamber and straight away start making sedentary comments. Thank you.

National Health Service (Energy Charges)

4. Michael Matheson (Falkirk West) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what assessment has been made of the impact that increasing energy charges are having on the NHS. (S30-3603)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon): Increases in energy costs have had and are having a severe impact on NHS Scotland, and we continue to monitor the situation very closely. Of course, that is just one of the reasons why the Government will continue to press for a share of Scotland's oil revenue to enable us to better deal with the impact of such increases across the Scottish economy.

Michael Matheson: The cabinet secretary will acknowledge the impact that increasing energy charges are also having on individual patients who have complex health problems and are supported at home. As it stands, health boards can provide financial support to meet energy costs only when a patient uses an oxygen concentrator. Does the cabinet secretary consider that when patients require the support of important life-sustaining equipment such as a ventilator, as is the case with one of my constituents, health boards should have the flexibility to provide them with financial support to meet the energy costs that are associated with running that important equipment?

Nicola Sturgeon: Michael Matheson raises an important point. I repeat that the impact on the NHS of rising energy costs is a serious matter, which we must treat seriously. Although Alistair Darling's coffers are being filled from the revenues

from the North Sea, we in Scotland do not, at the moment, have the benefit of that additional revenue in dealing with the points that Michael Matheson raises. Given the seriousness of his point on the impact on individual patients, I undertake to look into the matter and return to the member on it.

Scots Language (Audit)

5. Christina McKelvie (Central Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government when the audit of the Scots language will be complete. (S3O-3605)

The Minister for Europe, External Affairs and Culture (Linda Fabiani): It is anticipated that the audit of the Scots language will be complete by the end of October this year.

Christina McKelvie: As the minister is aware, the committee of experts of the European charter for regional or minority languages made it clear in March last year that the lack of any audit of the Scots language and speakers was a major concern and that it has inhibited the development of a comprehensive language policy. Does the minister agree with the committee's finding that the downgrading of Scots by the previous Administration has inhibited the growth and use of the language? Will the audit that she has ordered establish a baseline for the foundations that are needed to build a proper respect for the Scots language throughout Scotland?

Linda Fabiani: I am aware of the views of the committee of experts. I hope that those on this side of the chamber are also aware of them and that they share my concerns on the matter. This Government of Scotland has given a firm commitment to raise the profile and encourage the use of Scots in a variety of settings in public life. The audit that we are undertaking is the first of its kind; no such audit has been done by any Administration in Scotland. It will provide the necessary baseline data to assist the Government in formulating a cohesive policy for Scots, particularly with a view to ensuring that our European charter obligations for Scots—and, of course, our manifesto commitments on the matter—are fulfilled.

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab): Does the minister recognise that, under the previous Administration, the vitally important and internationally recognised work of Scottish Language Dictionaries Ltd received £115,000 per annum? Does she further recognise that, by the end of this financial year, that work will have received precisely nothing? Will she address that problem?

Linda Fabiani: As I have said on previous occasions in the chamber, when our audit of Scots

is complete, we will discuss the future of all Scots, whether language or culture, with the Scottish Arts Council, which has agreed to have those discussions. I reconfirm our commitment to Scots. I also reconfirm that the committee of experts spoke about the lack of a clearly defined language strategy for Scots and said that that has led to difficulties and the erosion of the language. This Government in Scotland is committed to the promotion of the Scots language.

Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy

6. Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what action is being taken to assist people who suffer from Duchenne muscular dystrophy. (S3O-3653)

The Minister for Public Health (Shona Robison): The Scottish Government wants to ensure that people in Scotland with Duchenne or any form of muscular dystrophy get access to services of the highest quality and achieve survival rates that are comparable with the best in other countries.

To achieve that aim, we have invested in the Scottish muscle network, which is the form of multidisciplinary working that is best suited to Scottish circumstances, including, of course, our geographical circumstances. Strengthening the network's geographical coverage has been a priority in allocating the resources that we have made available for genetics services. The investment in genetics services will improve the care of those with single gene complex disorders such as Duchenne.

Elaine Smith: I acknowledge the work that has been undertaken thus far. Is the minister aware of Action Duchenne's visit to the Parliament today, which I am hosting? The visit aims to highlight the benefits that improved support and services can contribute to the life expectancy and quality of life of people with DMD.

Given that Action Duchenne believes that Scotland requires a centre of excellence to bring the standard of care and treatment of DMD up to the level that is seen elsewhere in the United Kingdom, for example in centres in Newcastle-upon-Tyne and London, will the minister commit to considering funding and support to allow for the establishment of such a centre in Scotland? Action Duchenne proposes that the centre be located in Glasgow, where it would provide streamlined services to ensure best practice and to disperse standards of care into local clinics throughout Scotland.

Shona Robison: I am aware of the Action Duchenne visit, and I will come along to the meeting to talk to some of the people involved.

On the centre of excellence, the member will be aware that the clinicians who care for those with Duchenne feel that the geography of the country makes a single tertiary model inappropriate for the delivery of care in Scotland. I referred to that in my initial answer. It is for that reason that the clinicians formed the Scottish muscle network. As I said earlier, the Government has used funding for the review of genetics services to strengthen the network's geographic coverage and to enhance multidisciplinary working. Of course, I am happy to take forward discussions with members of Action Duchenne, whom I will meet at lunch time.

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-843)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): Later today, I will have meetings to take forward the Government's programme for Scotland, including meetings to look at the serious impact of rising energy prices throughout Scotland's industries and public services.

Ms Alexander: The Scottish National Party boasts of record funding for councils this year, so why do teachers, their unions and Scotland's directors of education agree that most councils will suffer education cuts this year?

The First Minister: There is no doubt about the figure for council spending in Scotland—it will be £34.9 billion in 2008 to 2011, an increase of 13.1 per cent over that period. That represents, for the first time in a generation, a rising share of the Scottish Government's budget. Given that Wendy Alexander, as I understand her position, believes that the Scottish budget was a generous settlement from Westminster—nobody else believes it, but she does—why does she not accept that, if there is a rising share for local government, it is getting an extremely good deal?

Ms Alexander: If everything is as rosy as the First Minister would have us believe, why, for the first time since devolution, will the leadership of the country's largest teaching union call at its conference tomorrow for ballots on industrial action to resist the education cuts?

The First Minister: Wendy Alexander should look at recent history. The Educational Institute of Scotland passed motions in 2004 and 2006 for industrial action. I do not think that industrial action is the way in which to progress a campaign for lower class sizes, but I agree with the EIS that lower class sizes are a desirable aim. In that, I join with the EIS and with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, through the concordat between Scottish Government and local government. The one person I know who does not agree with that is Wendy Alexander, who told *The Scotsman* last year that class sizes were not a particularly important indicator. Whatever else we might say, will Wendy Alexander join the consensus that class sizes are important and join with the SNP and local government in getting lower class sizes in Scottish schools?

Ms Alexander: Scotland's teachers do not like being conned any more than anyone else does. Last week, the First Minister could not answer the most basic questions on his class size promise. The growing crisis in classrooms up and down the country now runs much deeper. In the past week, *The Times Educational Supplement* has predicted a jobs crisis for new teachers. A survey of the directors of education shows that most councils are having to make cuts. The EIS general secretary has said:

"talk to any education authority and it will tell you how awful the settlement is".

According to the general secretary of the Headteachers Association of Scotland, Scottish education is in meltdown. Will the First Minister do the unthinkable and, for once, provide a serious answer? What will his Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning do to stop the cuts?

The First Minister: Let us take a look round Scotland to see the reality of what is happening with teachers and in schools and local authorities. Wendy Alexander's local authority, Renfrewshire Council, is introducing measures to lower class sizes. Fife Council is investing in improving education £9.6 million of the additional £40 million over three years that was won for the council. West Lothian Council and Stirling Council, under SNP control, are taking measures to reduce class sizes. East Ayrshire Council, another SNP council, is increasing its education budget this year by no less than 6.9 per cent. Of course, those councils are SNP led, and it might be that I want to make the political point that SNP councils place a higher priority on such matters than do other councils.

However, fair is fair, and I have been looking round the country. I have been looking at the councils that are abiding by the COSLA concordat with the Scottish Government on reducing class sizes. Only last week, COSLA said that it was moving towards that aim. I was struck by this quotation:

"The investment of 11 additional teachers will mean that 35 primary classes in the targeted schools are restricted to 18 or fewer pupils for the start of term in August. This represents a significant further step by the council to ensure the resources are provided to raise educational attainment within the schools serving priority communities."

The quotation is from Councillor Eddie McAvo, the leader of the Labour South Lanarkshire Council. If one of the few remaining Labour councils in Scotland can move in that direction, why cannot the others?

Ms Alexander: I direct the First Minister to the survey of directors of education: most councils are having to make cuts.

When I first raised these concerns about education cuts back in February, I was accused of scaremongering. This week, the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning received a letter from 80 teachers and staff at Paisley grammar school. I quote:

"We wish to express ... our growing sense of outrage and disbelief, at the effects the cuts to the education budget are having, on our school's ability to deliver a quality education for our pupils."

Is the First Minister now accusing the staff and parents of Paisley grammar school of scaremongering too?

The First Minister: No, I think that I will reserve that charge for Wendy Alexander, who is not able to face the subject. She is the only person I know of in Scotland who says that class sizes do not really matter. In *The Scotsman* on 11 September last year, she said:

"Class sizes are not a good measure of what matters."

In a debate last year, Karen Whitefield said:

"I assure the cabinet secretary that no Labour member is against a reduction in class sizes."—[*Official Report*, 5 December 2007; c 4077.]

Unfortunately, she did not prove that with her leader, who is one of the few people who do not think that class sizes matter.

An increasing number of local councils—I have listed some from across the country, and my statement is validated by figures that have been confirmed by COSLA—are moving to improve their education budgets and reduce class sizes. The reason why that is possible, within a tight financial settlement, is the historic concordat between central Government and local government in Scotland.

I read some comment today about the number of probationers who are getting into full-time employment as teachers in Scotland. The figure has reached 92.7 per cent. Now, I wish that the figure were higher than 92.7 per cent, but Wendy Alexander should consider that, in the last full year of Labour control, the figure was 91.8 per cent. Will she now acknowledge that improvements are being made in teacher employment across Scotland?

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): With respect, First Minister, it is for Wendy Alexander to ask the questions. Does Ms Alexander wish to ask a final question?

Ms Alexander: Yes, thank you, Presiding Officer.

The First Minister can give it out, but he cannot take it. The directors of education say that most councils are making cuts. Is he accusing the directors of education of scaremongering too?

The First Minister: I have named some councils—Fife, West Lothian, Stirling and East Ayrshire—and I have talked about the improvements. I have even—in the generosity of spirit for which I am famed and renowned—complimented South Lanarkshire Council. If all those councils are able to respond to the initiatives in the concordat, why on earth cannot the ones that Wendy Alexander is perhaps more familiar with than I am do exactly the same? It is time for her to face facts.

Prime Minister (Meetings)

2. Annabel Goldie (West of Scotland) (Con): To ask the First Minister when he will next meet the Prime Minister. (S3F-844)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): I have no immediate plans to meet the Prime Minister, although I have been in correspondence with him in the past few days.

Annabel Goldie: I will ask the First Minister about a condition that does not hit the headlines but which the chief medical officer in England has described as “a Cinderella issue” and as one that “is known internationally as the silent killer.”

I refer to thrombosis, which is commonly known as a blood clot.

I think that everyone in the Parliament is familiar with the tragedy that confronted the McPherson family of Langbank. I pay tribute to Gordon McPherson for his courage and the excellent work that he has done.

Most people will be astonished to learn that thrombosis is responsible for more than 12,000 deaths a year in Scotland. When I say that that is nearly four times the combined total of all those who die from breast cancer, HIV/AIDS and road traffic accidents, we can all see that the description “silent killer” is chillingly apt.

I am aware that guidelines are being reviewed and that a consultation on draft guidelines is expected in 2009. Given the condition’s seriousness, does the First Minister really think that expecting a consultation on draft guidelines some time next year is treating the subject with the urgency that it deserves?

The First Minister: As Annabel Goldie knows, consultation is important. She will also know that we recently funded Lifeblood: the Thrombosis Charity to produce an information leaflet. I share her concern about thrombosis and I agree with her graphic but serious description. I shall certainly write to or meet her if she feels that further discussion about prioritisation would help.

Annabel Goldie: It is estimated that one in 20 people carry a gene that increases their risk of

developing a blood clot. Acquired conditions such as pregnancy and cancer also increase the risk of developing a thrombosis. Given the magnitude of annual deaths from thrombosis in Scotland, does the First Minister accept the urgent need to consider intervention such as testing for that gene, for which a simple test is available? Will he consult his chief medical officer and report to the Parliament as soon as practicable? We can no longer sit back and ignore the silent killer.

The First Minister: Screening is available for people with a family history of thrombosis, but I undertake to consult the chief medical officer on whether further measures would help in tackling this serious problem. I will come back to Annabel Goldie on that.

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-845)

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

Nicol Stephen: On 11 January, the Scottish Government issued a press release that claimed that Glasgow Science Centre would receive “a major cash injection”. Here it is—it says:

“Hyslop Hails Bright Future for Glasgow Science Centre”.

She said that the centre played “a vital role” and was “flying high”. After all that propaganda, did the First Minister expect the money from his Government for the centre to go up or down?

The First Minister: The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning has met Kirk Ramsay, the centre’s chief executive, and we will take forward the issue seriously.

Nicol Stephen: Well—such warm words were exactly what the Government’s press release contained, but the reality is that last year’s grant of £1.7 million became £1.4 million this year and that more cuts will be made next year and the year after. That represents a 40 per cent cut in funding.

The centre has international standing, hundreds of thousands of visitors every year and a mission to inspire children about science. It has targets to attract young people from the most disadvantaged communities in Scotland. Given that, why did the First Minister’s Government decide to cut the centre’s money this year, next year and the year after? Will he agree to stop the cuts at the centre now? Will he tell us who else has been promised a bright future and who else is flying high, so that they can check their wallets before it is too late?

The First Minister: I would never promise Nicol Stephen a bright future, and I do not think that anybody else in politics would either.

I want to make a serious point. The talks in which the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning was involved with the chief executive of the Glasgow Science Centre were actually on the extension of funding in period terms and putting all science centres in Scotland on a secure and sustainable footing. I would have thought that Nicol Stephen would think that there was something to welcome in those talks and in having such a constructive attitude.

The Presiding Officer: I have a number of requests from members to ask supplementary questions. I will do my best to get in as many such questions as possible.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): The First Minister will be aware of the tragic accident that happened yesterday on the A9 at Pitlochry, which involved a head-on collision between two cars on a single-carriageway stretch of the road. The accident left two dead; others had serious injuries. I am sure that the First Minister will want to join me in sending condolences to the families of those who were involved.

I recently obtained answers to parliamentary questions that showed that the accident rate on the single-carriageway sections of the A9 is four times that on the dual-carriageway sections. Does the First Minister accept that there is an unanswerable case for upgrading the remaining single-carriageway sections of the A9 between Perth and Inverness to dual-carriageway status? Can he say how and when his Government will progress that work?

The First Minister: First, I want to express my sympathy for the victims and casualties of the accident that Murdo Fraser mentioned.

Murdo Fraser will know that work is going on at the moment on the A9. Earlier this year, I inspected the safety improvements and dualling that is taking place at Ballinluig. A programme to dual the A9, which is part of the infrastructure plan, is going forward. The programme is a step-by-step programme that considers priority areas—that must be done in government. Nonetheless, work is going on, and I know that Murdo Fraser will welcome that.

Andy Kerr (East Kilbride) (Lab): The First Minister will be aware of the announcement that Freescale Semiconductor made earlier this week about the closure of its East Kilbride plant. Some 750 or more jobs in the community will potentially be lost, which is a devastating blow for employees of that company, their families and the local economy. The closure of the plant will not be immediate, but the early indications are that it will

close early in 2009. Will the First Minister give an assurance that the enterprise agencies and others will use the intervening period effectively to ensure that the highly skilled and loyal workforce that is involved will receive advice on gaining future employment and support for that? Will he give an assurance that the research and development jobs that are based in East Kilbride will stay in East Kilbride?

The First Minister: I have read comments that Andy Kerr has made on the matter. He has acknowledged and welcomed the work that Scottish Development International has done over the past year since the initial announcement that was made. Closure of the plant is now the likely option, as he rightly said—that is what the company has suggested. That will be a severe blow, but I give him the assurance that there will be the usual intervention to help the workforce find future employment. There are fewer research and development jobs, but he will welcome, as I do, the work that SDI has done with the company to secure those jobs for Scotland.

The lack of ability to market the plant as a going concern sends out serious messages for part—and only part—of the electronics sector in Scotland. However, I hope that we will be able to retain and, over time, grow the research and development jobs. Perhaps that points the way to how industrial strategy can be switched in areas in which Scotland remains outstandingly internationally competitive.

Tricia Marwick (Central Fife) (SNP): Is the First Minister aware that the Maritime and Coastguard Agency has published draft regulations that, if brought into force, will force all ship-to-ship transfers to take place within harbour authority areas? Does he agree that those regulations would leave the Firth of Forth wide open to many further applications to transfer oil there? Will he make representations to the MCA on the need to exclude the Firth of Forth from those regulations? Does what has happened not illustrate again the need for the Parliament to have powers to regulate ship-to-ship oil transfers in Scottish waters?

The First Minister: I agree with much of what Tricia Marwick says. However, it is important to acknowledge that at least there is recognition that some form of overall regulation is necessary and that there should be a coherent system for ship-to-ship transfers. I do not think that anyone in the Parliament would think it appropriate to have to keep on revisiting individual proposals. In the case of the Firth of Forth, I think that the entire Parliament and every community around the Forth estuary have found the situation totally unacceptable.

Tricia Marwick's final question is crucial. It seems obvious to me, given our environmental responsibilities, that powers over ship-to-ship transfers should be transferred to the Parliament so that we can do our job in representing the best interests of the Scottish people.

Sexual Health

4. Ian McKee (Lothians) (SNP): To ask the First Minister whether the Scottish Government plans to take additional measures in light of the increase in sexually transmitted diseases and their possible impact on fertility. (S3F-860)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): The rise in the number of sexually transmitted infections in Scotland is of great concern although, in part, it reflects an increase in testing. We have matched previous levels of funding by investing £15 million over three years in the national sexual health strategy. We have also gone beyond that with additional funding to improve access to independent sexual health information in rural areas.

Early diagnosis and treatment will help to prevent longer-term problems that may be associated with STIs, including infertility. National health service boards have a central role to play in implementing the sexual health strategy. They are working to increase testing for STIs, especially chlamydia, in those who are under the age of 25.

Ian McKee: The First Minister will be aware that there is good evidence that marginalised groups of young people who suffer from low self-esteem and lack of confidence are more likely to suffer the consequences of poor sexual health yet are least likely to take up existing services—a situation that should worry members of all parties. Does the First Minister share that concern?

The First Minister: I do share that concern. As Ian McKee will be aware, the new sexual health standards that were published by NHS Quality Improvement Scotland in March include a new target for chlamydia testing of young people in particular. For the first time, there is also a standard on tracing the former partners of those who have been diagnosed with an STI.

Ian McKee makes an important point about the situation of disadvantaged people, which is worthy of pursuit—on a cross-party basis, if he wishes—between him and the Minister for Public Health. They may wish to consider in particular the arguments around how the initiatives that we are taking will impact on the more socially deprived communities.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): What action is the First Minister's Government taking to ensure that people who live in the most remote areas of

Scotland have local and real, physical access to sexual health clinics?

The First Minister: I have talked about the additional funding that is being provided to improve access to independent sexual health information in rural areas. That additional funding is being provided this year to do exactly that. The member would do well to join Ian McKee in looking at the issue and meeting the Minister for Public Health.

Renewable Capacity (Public Buildings)

5. Sarah Boyack (Edinburgh Central) (Lab): To ask the First Minister, on world environment day, whether the Scottish Government remains committed to ensuring that there is a renewable capacity in each public building. (S3F-853)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): As the member knows, our target of reducing CO₂ emissions by 80 per cent by 2050 means that we must transform the way in which we use, save and generate energy. The Government's ambition is to see renewable capacity in every Scottish community, and that includes our public buildings. This is a generational transformation, which is why, for example, we are tasking the Scottish futures trust with ensuring that new public buildings are also green public buildings.

Indeed, our leading by example programme will lift all aspects of environmental performance across the public sector. We are targeting practical and financial support for on-site renewables to where that will have the most effect. As the member knows, we have tripled the funding for community generation and microgeneration—£13.5 million is being made available each year, compared with the previous Administration's £4.5 million. We are extending the public sector fund for energy efficiency to allow it to be used to support renewables technologies as well as energy efficiency. We are also providing additional expertise specifically to support an increase in the installation of renewable energy technology in Scotland's schools.

Sarah Boyack: I welcome the First Minister's commitment to move in the right direction on the issue and his acknowledgement of the importance of having renewables in every public building in order to reduce CO₂ emissions and of the Government leading by example. Will he, therefore, set specific carbon reduction targets and a completion date for those commitments? Given the fact that the Scottish National Party manifesto promised to kick-start the process with the installation of renewables technology in every school in Scotland, will he clarify what specific resources have been made available to deliver on that promise, either by the Government or by local authorities? Will he tell us when that promise will

be delivered on? One of the first acts of the new SNP council in Edinburgh was to remove three renewables projects from the new schools programme that it inherited from Labour.

The First Minister: I am sure that Sarah Boyack will acknowledge that I listed the increased funding that is available for community generation and microgeneration. Just this week, in an historic joint launch with the Scottish Green Party, we launched a climate change fund of £18 million to enable communities throughout Scotland to tackle climate change issues and embrace renewables.

Sarah Boyack is right. We identified in our manifesto, on page 29, the opportunity to move towards renewable generation in Scottish schools. In addition to the various initiatives that I listed—she had the courtesy to acknowledge that she approves of those—there will be more announcements shortly on how we can realise the ambition of having renewable capacity in Scotland's schools.

Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind): I am just as patient as the First Minister is generous in spirit. I seek his guidance on getting the answer to a question that I have asked eight times. It was first lodged on 10 January 2006, and Mr MacAskill answered it on 18 January 2006. Will the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body publish details of the Parliament's energy performance, as required by the European Union energy performance of buildings directive, which came into force on 4 January 2006? The directive requires a large, easily read poster to be put in a prominent place so that people can see how energy efficient we are—or are not.

The Presiding Officer: I cannot ask the First Minister to speak for the SPCB, but I am sure that he will want to.

The First Minister: Presiding Officer, I would not presume to comment on your duties or those of the corporate body. As Margo MacDonald well knows, I give her guidance and help as often as I possibly can.

I saw some interest around the chamber when she mentioned 2006. Kenny MacAskill was not a minister then, but he answered the question for the corporate body.

Although I am happy and enthusiastic to give Margo MacDonald as much guidance as possible, it would be prudent for me to accept the Presiding Officer's guidance and leave the matter, interesting and important though it is, to the corporate body and the Presiding Officer.

High-speed Rail Links

6. Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): I noted the previous question.

To ask the First Minister what discussions have taken place at ministerial or official level regarding the construction of high-speed rail links between Scotland and England. (S3F-862)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): I congratulate Alex Johnstone on being the first member to answer a question before asking one.

The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change met the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Tom Harris MP, on 28 May to discuss the potential for a high-speed rail link between Scotland and England. As I said in the chamber on 6 March, a fast rail link is likely to carry substantial support throughout the parties in the Parliament. According to a recent report by Atkins, the Scottish economy could benefit from such a link by up to £7.3 billion. We therefore continue to press the United Kingdom Government to work with us towards that aim, at the same time as finding ways to improve journey times for existing services.

Alex Johnstone: I am delighted that the First Minister is once again bringing his Government into a position of agreeing with a Conservative party manifesto commitment. However, given that Scotland has and will continue to have significant commitments on carbon reduction, it is embarrassing that we now have such a large number of flights between Scotland and the nation's capital. Consequently, will the First Minister press forward with a comprehensive feasibility study that begins to move the project from policy and manifesto documents to the drawing board and, ultimately, to trains that connect us to the European high-speed rail network?

The First Minister: I was busy nodding along with Alex Johnstone and was going to give him a tremendously supportive answer until he started talking about national capitals and ruined it all.

Where we are shows some indications of progress. As Alex Johnstone will remember, in December 2006 the then Secretary of State for Transport received a report from Rod Eddington, the former chief executive of British Airways, which astonishingly came to the conclusion that such a fast link should not be a great priority. I am sure that his former employment had nothing whatsoever to do with that unfortunate conclusion.

We have moved on to some extent. There has been no commitment by the United Kingdom Government, but at least Network Rail has been charged with studying capacity solutions for cross-border services. It will be able to consider all options for improving capacity, specifically including high-speed rail and, of course, improvements in the current service.

I am not overegging the situation because Tom Harris made it clear that there was no commitment from the UK Government to the proposal, but we have at least moved a little from the position in December 2006. Given recent events in the world, there must be a growing realisation that high-speed rail should be considered in all seriousness as the logical, intelligent and environmental way to carry the bulk of journeys between Scotland and however we want to describe the city of London and elsewhere.

I must confess that I had absolutely no idea that a high-speed rail link was in the Conservative party's manifesto, but we must not let that unfortunate fact cloud what might be a really good idea.

12:31

Meeting suspended until 14:15.

14:15

On resuming—

Question Time

SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

Justice and Law Officers

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): Question 1 was not lodged.

Wildlife Crime (Snaring)

2. Peter Peacock (Highlands and Islands (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive how many people have been charged and how many have been prosecuted for using illegal snaring practices on protected species, as designated in the European Union habitats directive, in the last three years. (S3O-3650)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): Statistics on persons charged by the police are not collected centrally. Our data indicate that, in the past three years, two persons have been prosecuted in Scottish courts where the main offence related to the use of illegal snaring practices: one person in 2004-05 and one in 2005-06.

We are taking action to strengthen wildlife crime enforcement. We have ensured the operations of the national wildlife crime unit in North Berwick with new funding and will discuss specific Scottish objectives with the unit. We are also providing more than £200,000 of new funding for wildlife crime enforcement projects through the partnership for action against wildlife crime.

Peter Peacock: The minister will be aware of the nation's love for wild animals, as displayed by the millions of people who will watch "Springwatch" over the next few weeks and through Scotland's national week for wildlife, which is next week. The Government's decision not to ban snaring leaves questions about how to police snaring that is allowed and to stop practices that break the rules on allowable use of snares. Will the minister explain how, in the absence of a total ban on snaring, the Government intends to ensure that unlicensed snaring is policed? Will he also say whether estates that previously had snaring licences but which no longer have them will receive particular attention from police forces, and how enforcement of legislation and prosecution of offenders can be carried out effectively?

Kenny MacAskill: There are two matters in Peter Peacock's questions: prevention and prosecution. On prosecution, we have set up the

specialist wildlife crime unit, which we are delighted to have done. Also, there is a great deal more specialism within the Crown Office, which helps to ensure that people who are brought to book are held to account for their actions. We must work with all parties that share an interest in prevention, in particular those who are involved in estates and game hunting.

As Peter Peacock said, protection of wildlife is important to our people. We must ensure that, where snaring is used, it is used appropriately and within the law, but we must also ensure that people who have a legitimate reason for snaring are protected. Apart from a small minority, whom we must target, everyone seeks to be on the same side. The best we can do is co-operate, whether that means the Crown and the police co-operating on expertise, or the Government and bodies in the rural sector that have a shared interest in ensuring that the wildlife in Scotland is properly protected—not only for our citizens but for those who come from abroad to see it—co-operate.

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): The cabinet secretary might be aware of the recent abhorrent incident in the Scottish Borders in which two badgers were horribly garrotted by snares and dumped by the roadside to give the appearance of being road-kill. Given that the Minister for Environment is pursuing the licensing of snares, is the cabinet secretary in a position to say when training of additional specialist wildlife crime officers will commence? If he is not able to do so today, will he advise me shortly in writing?

Kenny MacAskill: I will be happy to advise Christine Grahame in writing. Money has been allocated and those matters are being addressed. We have one officer, whom we see frequently. This is not simply about policing—it is also about prosecution. I am more than happy to write to Christine Grahame to detail what action is under way, what action is due to commence and what the timelines are.

Closed-circuit Television Systems

3. Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): To ask the Scottish Executive how it measures the effectiveness of publicly funded CCTV systems. (S3O-3571)

The Minister for Community Safety (Fergus Ewing): The Scottish Government does not directly monitor the effectiveness of public-space closed-circuit television systems that are controlled by other public authorities. However, we believe that public-space CCTV systems can play an important role in the prevention, detection and prosecution of crime. To help to clarify that role, we are currently undertaking a strategic review of

the use of public-space CCTV in Scotland, which will conclude later in the summer.

Patrick Harvie: The minister might be aware of Home Office research that puts many questions on current CCTV deployment and its extent, and of the comments of the general manager of Glasgow Community and Safety Services, which is a major operator of CCTV. He said:

“It’s very difficult to look at statistics and say whether CCTV is working or not. There are too many reports saying ‘maybe it does, maybe it doesn’t’. But we are convinced it is beneficial”.

That comment seems to suggest an act of faith, rather than evidence-based policy making. Does the minister agree that, although most people would agree that CCTV has a role to play, they wish to resist the trend towards all of us living our lives under permanent 24-hour surveillance? Are we not failing to define properly the boundaries and limits within which surveillance can operate and the failure test for public support?

Fergus Ewing: We believe that CCTV plays an extremely useful part in detecting and prosecuting crime. The idea that we are somehow all going to be placed under 24-hour surveillance is somewhat overblown and extravagant—even if we had the money to undertake such a spurious and futile venture. The review is being undertaken, and if Patrick Harvie wishes to send in specific evidence, we will of course consider it, along with everyone else’s views.

I highlight the evidence from Detective Chief Superintendent John Carnochan to the health inequalities task force. Detective Chief Superintendent Carnochan showed images of a murder in the centre of Glasgow in 1997, in which an innocent bystander was stabbed by a young man, who went on to be sentenced to seven years for culpable homicide. It was CCTV evidence, in part, that led to that conviction. I hope, therefore, that all members will continue to endorse the use of CCTV for such valuable purposes.

Planning (Enforcement Notices)

4. Iain Smith (North East Fife) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive what proportion of breaches of enforcement or stop notices notified to procurators fiscal by planning authorities led to a prosecution in the most recent period for which figures are available. (S3O-3669)

The Lord Advocate (Elish Angiolini): In the two financial years from 2006-07, a total of 12 charges of breaches of enforcement or stop notices were reported to procurators fiscal across Scotland, and 11 of those charges resulted in a prosecution.

Iain Smith: I welcome the fact that prosecutions are being pursued. However, I am sure that the

Lord Advocate will be aware of the perception among planning authorities that such cases are given a low priority by fiscals and the courts and that they are sometimes reluctant to proceed with enforcement and stop notices, because they do not think that they will get the necessary support from the court system. Will the Lord Advocate ask her procurators fiscal to discuss the matter with planning authorities to ensure that that is not the case?

On a specific case in St Andrews, in relation to which I have been in correspondence with the Lord Advocate, the Lord Advocate said:

“should a report be submitted this was a case where criminal proceedings would be contemplated”

and Fife Council, in response to a constituent of mine, said:

“we are required by the Crown Office to obtain formal legal clearance to access the online system for lodging cases with the Procurator Fiscal. This application has been with the Crown Office since March ... awaiting processing”.

Will the Lord Advocate agree to look into that case to find out what the problem is with access to the electronic system?

The Lord Advocate: I am not aware of concerns among local authorities on the priority that is given to such matters. There is detailed guidance for procurators fiscal about contraventions of planning law. There are good relations with local authorities across the range of reporting matters, including environmental health. Procurators fiscal will consider those issues.

There is a hierarchy of priority in prosecution. If a person is murdered—for example, the horrendous murders that have been taking place in Glasgow—or if there are cases of robbery or child abuse, or serious environmental cases, there must be a natural hierarchy in any court or prosecution system.

Nonetheless, planning is taken extremely seriously by procurators fiscal. It is an important aspect of our environmental law. In cases where enforcement notices have been served and there has been an appeal, that in itself might be an obstacle to prosecution. However, as I understand the matter, given the provisions of the Planning etc (Scotland) Act 2006—which, although passed, have not yet been implemented and are subject to consultation—there will be no provision available to allow an appeal against a decision to raise an enforcement notice. That obstacle will be removed, and new provisions will come into effect covering fixed-penalty notices, which will allow rapid enforcement, rather than there being a long wait while matters go through the system of law.

It is not the case that procurators fiscal do not consider these matters to be important—clearly,

there are few such cases. As I understand it, local authorities view prosecution as the last resort, so other avenues are pursued before reports are made to procurators fiscal. If Fife Council or any other council has concerns, I am sure that the procurators fiscal of Scotland would be extremely pleased to discuss them.

Environmental Crime Legislation

5. Sarah Boyack (Edinburgh Central) (Lab):

To ask the Scottish Executive what resources it will invest in the enforcement of environmental crime legislation. (S3O-3618)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): The Scottish Government provides substantial resources to a range of public bodies to enable them to enforce environmental legislation, including the Scottish Environment Protection Agency, local authorities and Scottish Natural Heritage. To support the fight against wildlife crime, we are also giving new funding of over £200,000 to the partnership for action against wildlife crime, and £50,000 to the national wildlife crime unit.

Sarah Boyack: I particularly welcome the new resources for tackling wildlife crime. Does the minister acknowledge that other enforcement agencies, which are not part of the police, are crucial in the identification and pursuit of cases of environmental and wildlife crime? Will he commit to having discussions with the Minister for Environment in particular to ensure that organisations such as the Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals are not left out of pocket by doing the job that more mainstream criminal enforcement agencies would be expected to carry out?

Kenny MacAskill: I am more than happy to undertake to do that. In my answer to Peter Peacock's question, I acknowledged that we require to prevent, as well as to prosecute, wildlife crime. We require to work with all those who have an interest in ensuring that our wildlife is protected. Sarah Boyack was correct to mention the SSPCA, but other bodies are involved, too. It is a question of acknowledging that we are all on the same side. There are specific roles and tasks for statutory bodies, the police and the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service. On behalf of the justice department, and, indeed, the entire Government, I am more than happy to undertake to work collectively with others—as the member would expect, given that we are dealing consensually with such matters in the chamber—to ensure that we do what is necessary to protect our wildlife and to prosecute if need be.

Police Numbers

6. Paul Martin (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab):

To ask the Scottish Executive whether it expects to have 17,265 police officers in place by March 2011, in line with the commitment made in the Scottish National Party's 2007 manifesto. (S3O-3637)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): Our manifesto commitment was to recruit an additional 1,000 officers over the lifetime of this parliamentary session. That is what we said we would deliver and that is what we will deliver. We have always been clear that this is not simply about a head count but about building policing capacity in Scotland's communities through increased recruitment, improved opportunities for retention, and redeployment of officers to support operational policing. We are already seeing real progress towards that.

Record levels of recruits are due to be trained at Tulliallan this year—twice the number who were trained in the last year of the previous Administration. The Strathclyde joint police board has approved Chief Constable Steve House's plans to increase its force establishment by 800 from 7,200 to 8,000 by 2011, putting more officers on the streets of Scotland's communities.

Our summary justice reforms, which began to take effect in March this year, will bring real benefits to the police in terms of efficient use of officer time.

We are working with chief constables, police board conveners and other stakeholders to ensure that Scotland's communities have a clear understanding of the levels of policing that they have a right to expect, how that is being delivered and how their views are being taken into account.

Paul Martin: We welcome the co-operation that is taking place with all the agencies that the cabinet secretary mentioned. Perhaps the cabinet secretary will co-operate with us today and clarify this: on 31 March 2011, will there be 17,265 police officers in place throughout communities in Scotland—yes or no?

Kenny MacAskill: I remind Parliament that this Government inherited the lowest level of recruitment of police officers since devolution. We also faced the highest level of retirements because of demographics. However, thankfully, this Government is delivering an additional 1,000 officers through the three Rs—recruitment, retention and redeployment—which makes our communities safer and contrasts favourably with the Labour Party's zero proposal to recruit nobody, which left us with the lowest level of recruitment since devolution. That is why Mr Martin should welcome not only the actions of this Government but the actions of his chief constable.

Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con): Despite Paul Martin's best efforts, we did not get an answer. Does the cabinet secretary accept that his policy of emptying our prisons by letting prisoners out after serving a quarter of their sentences will mean that the same police officers will have to arrest the same offenders two or three times, with the result that even 17,265 police officers might not be adequate?

Kenny MacAskill: I may need to adopt the position of the previous Administration by reminding members and the general public that automatic early release was brought in under legislation that was introduced by the Tory Government. As on a variety of other matters that we have inherited, on prisons we can be thankful for the Government's commitments. We are committed to building three new prisons, including what will be called HMP Grampian, as we announced yesterday, whereas not one new prison was built in 18 years of Tory rule, despite Mr Aitken's desire to see such prisons being replicated the length and breadth of the country. The fact is that the McLeish commission is on the case and is examining unconditional automatic early release. When the commission's report is published at the beginning of July, Mr Aitken should welcome it as he did when he attended the reception that was held at Bute house last night for the members of the commission.

Drug Misuse (Dundee)

7. Joe FitzPatrick (Dundee West) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what steps the Cabinet Secretary for Justice is taking to tackle drug misuse in Dundee. (S3O-3596)

The Minister for Community Safety (Fergus Ewing): As set out in the new drugs strategy—"The Road to Recovery: A New Approach to Tackling Scotland's Drug Problem", which was published last week—the Scottish Government is committed to a new approach to tackling drug misuse across Scotland. Dundee will receive its share of the £94 million that is to be made available over the next three years in the justice portfolio to tackle drug misuse, alongside the resources that are contributed by local partners such as Dundee City Council. It will be for the local alcohol and drug action team to decide how those resources should be allocated according to local needs and priorities in order to achieve maximum benefit for the people of Dundee.

Joe FitzPatrick: As has been highlighted recently by Dundee's *Evening Telegraph*, drug-related antisocial behaviour is a problem in Dundee and elsewhere in Scotland. My constituents are becoming increasingly concerned about incidents that range from the use of stairwells and other public places for drug taking,

to threatening behaviour in town centres and streets. What measures can be taken to combat drug-related antisocial behaviour in Dundee?

Fergus Ewing: I am certainly aware of the statistics that have been referred to in the local paper's campaign and in associated publicity. I also recognise that Joe FitzPatrick has taken an active role in advocating that steps must be taken to tackle the situation.

The Government stands four-square behind the police in their efforts to tackle such matters. I believe—as, I imagine, Joe FitzPatrick does—that the most effective approach is to allow decisions to be made at local level on a community basis so that they are informed by close knowledge of the problems. I do not think that he is asking for the cabinet secretary and me to direct or dictate how the police tackle such issues, although we are of course fully behind the police's efforts.

The Presiding Officer: I call Nigel Don, and I remind him that the question relates to Dundee.

Nigel Don (North East Scotland) (SNP): Thank you, Presiding Officer.

The minister will be aware that the north-east region—in which Dundee lies—has a problem with high use of crack cocaine. In the light of that problem and of the fact that the vast majority of seizures of crack cocaine are carried out by Grampian Police, what steps are being taken to tackle the rise of crack cocaine in the north-east region?

The Presiding Officer: That was good enough, Mr Don.

Fergus Ewing: I congratulate Nigel Don on his ingenuity in framing that question. I am able to inform him that the latest drug seizure figures—admittedly, they are for the whole of Scotland—show that the number of seizures of class A drugs is up by almost 18 per cent and stands at 6,451. That is the highest number of class A seizures on record. I am aware that Aberdeen—if I am allowed to refer to that city, Presiding Officer—has a particular problem with cocaine. We are not complacent. Drug dealers are interested not in peddling a particular type of drug but in making profits and wielding power. That is why we stand fully behind the efforts of Gordon Meldrum and the Scottish Crime and Drug Enforcement Agency and the police in continuing successfully to tackle drug dealing. I hope that all members will combine in giving their full backing to the excellent work that those agencies do.

The Presiding Officer: Question 8 has been withdrawn.

Traffic Management (Galas and Events)

9. Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive how it will ensure that police forces implement “Galas and Events Affecting Public Roads—Guidance to Organisers” so that local shows, highland games and other events are not burdened with excessive costs. (S3O-3578)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): The implementation of “Galas and Events Affecting Public Roads—Guidance to Organisers” is a matter for the appropriate roads authority to consider, in discussion with the police and the event organisers, while using its discretion on the level of any associated costs.

The Scottish Government will launch a consultation later this month to assess the implementation of the new rules and processes for marches and parades, which were introduced by the Police, Public Order and Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act 2006.

Jamie McGrigor: I wrote to the cabinet secretary recently to highlight the case of the organisers of the Inverary highland games, who, thanks to the new rules, faced new costs this year of up to £1,300, for the use of a traffic management company and for a temporary traffic order. Since my intervention, I am pleased that the local police seem to have reconsidered the matter. The costs will not be incurred this year, but no guarantee on future years has been given.

Can the minister guarantee that scores of local shows and highland games will not have to pay huge new costs for services that police forces have always been willing to provide without charge?

Kenny MacAskill: The member is aware that the 2006 act was passed under the previous Administration, although we supported its ethos. Although in many instances it is for local authorities to decide such matters based on advice from the local police, all members of Parliament, whether they were in government or in opposition, intended that there should be an attempt to differentiate between galas and community events, which must be supported, and events that bring with them much paraphernalia and many problems.

We can give no guarantee, because many of the matters to which Jamie McGrigor referred are in the domain of local authorities and the police, who must act and charge as they see fit, as per the legislation. However, we are considering how to improve the situation. We supported the 2006 act, because matters that are of great concern to communities in Scotland must be tackled, but we must ensure that we do not damage events that are of great benefit to communities.

Rural Affairs and the Environment

Waste Recycling Targets

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

To ask the Scottish Executive how waste recycling targets will be monitored under single outcome agreements. (S3O-3628)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment (Richard Lochhead):

Monitoring of progress on single outcome agreement targets will be undertaken through submission of annual progress reports by local authorities.

Marlyn Glen: It sounds as though the cabinet secretary intends to wait and see what happens and then to monitor progress, which concerns me. Given the removal of much ring fencing, does he share my concern that targets might not be met because the demands of large service departments in councils, such as education and social work, will take priority? At least some local authorities might decide to concentrate more on local objectives than on co-operative, regional objectives. Given the importance of regional co-operation in the context of recycling, how will the minister ensure that targets are met?

Richard Lochhead: The Scottish Government set ambitious targets, which by definition are challenging. I have met representatives of local authorities in the member's area, who have given me a different, extremely enthusiastic message. The vast majority of councils in the area have exceeded the target that had to be met by the end of 2007 and continue to make excellent progress. I am confident that many targets will be met by authorities in North East Scotland and elsewhere.

A record level of funding was transferred to local authorities as part of the local government settlement. We have had extremely positive feedback since then on the priority that local authorities are giving to their environmental obligations.

Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):

Will the cabinet secretary clarify whether the figures that are being collected by local councils will separate out recycling and composting rates so that we can get a true picture of the rate for both, in order to decrease the amount of waste that goes to landfill?

Richard Lochhead: That is certainly one aspect that we hope to take into account in the revision of the national waste plan, which will be taken forward shortly. At the moment, of course, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency publishes many such figures quarterly. I will discuss with SEPA what potential there is for publishing

separate figures in the future to give to Rob Gibson and others who require that information.

The Presiding Officer: Question 2 has been withdrawn.

Recycling Rates

3. Brian Adam (Aberdeen North) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what further support it can give to local authorities to improve recycling rates. (S3O-3587)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment (Richard Lochhead): We already support local authorities by, for example, funding work on waste education and awareness and supporting work on developing markets for recycled products. We are considering with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities how best to allocate much of the zero waste fund, and we have also considered with it whether a national advice service on recycling collections would be beneficial.

Brian Adam: I am sure that the cabinet secretary is aware of the recently published figures that suggest distinct challenges in our urban areas, which perform poorly on recycling. I highlight the situation in my city, where the recycling rate in percentage terms is in the mid to high 20s. The situation is causing budgetary challenges that need to be addressed anyway.

Can the cabinet secretary give me comfort that the unique problems of tenement properties and larger businesses are recognised? What steps will he take to address the different difficulties in urban and rural areas?

Richard Lochhead: The Scottish Government is very conscious of the different levels of challenge that face local authorities in different parts of the country. We do our best to take that into account.

I am pleased that Aberdeen City Council recently committed to achieving a 40 per cent recycling rate by 2011. Although I recognise that it has a long way to go to reach some of the existing targets, I welcome the ambitious 2011 target that it has set.

A national advice service would help local authorities to share best practice, given that they face different challenges. When I met Glasgow City Council a week or so ago, I learned that it faces challenges similar to those in other urban areas, particularly with tenements. There is a strong case for sharing best practice between authorities so that they can move forward and achieve their ambitious targets.

Recycling (Private Sector)

4. Michael McMahon (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what plans it has to encourage recycling in the private sector. (S3O-3642)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment (Richard Lochhead): The Scottish Government considers that businesses should be encouraged to take steps to reduce, re-use and recycle the waste that they produce in line with our policy of moving towards a zero waste society.

To help private sector firms, we fund the envirowise programme, which provides free advice and support on recycling and other activities to make more efficient use of resources, often resulting in lower costs to business in the process. The Scottish Government also funds the Scottish waste awareness group, which produces a business recycling directory to give advice on facilities available locally.

Michael McMahon: The minister is aware that Scottish Environment Protection Agency consulted widely with business in March 2007 and introduced the business waste framework to assist businesses with recycling initiatives. The overall aim was to reduce the amount of business waste from premises by at least 200,000 tonnes and save businesses in Scotland £7.5 million a year through waste minimisation and diversion from landfill. How is that work progressing, and are the targets that the minister outlined being met?

Richard Lochhead: One commitment that we have given and which I am sure the member will welcome is to set distinct recycling targets for the business and commercial sector. If there is one lesson that I have learned during the eight or nine years since the Parliament was established, it is that that area has been neglected because much of the emphasis has been on municipal waste. We must do a lot more to encourage recycling in the business sector.

One of the difficulties is lack of information. Although a lot of recycling is going on in the business and commercial sector—which, let us remember, accounts for more than 80 per cent of all waste in Scotland—it is difficult to ascertain exact recycling levels. First, we need good information. As the member said, SEPA is making progress in that regard. Secondly, we need to set distinct targets in the future.

Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con): The waste hierarchy states clearly that, where possible, waste should be recycled rather than incinerated for energy recovery. Will the cabinet secretary take steps to ensure that incentives are given only for the incineration of waste wood,

which cannot be recycled, in accordance with the waste hierarchy?

Richard Lochhead: Our waste policy pays close attention to the waste hierarchy. That is why, as I said in my ministerial statement a few months ago, we set the ambitious target that 70 per cent of municipal waste will be recycled by 2025, with a maximum of 5 per cent being sent to landfill and a maximum of 25 per cent being used for energy from waste. That target gained broad support in the Parliament and it is supported by the Sustainable Development Commission, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency and many local authorities to which I have spoken in the past few months. It is vital that we pay close attention to the waste hierarchy and that only residual waste is sent to energy-from-waste plants in the years ahead.

Drainage and Sewerage (Glasgow)

5. Charlie Gordon (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive how it will support the metropolitan Glasgow strategic drainage partnership. (S3O-3629)

The Minister for Environment (Michael Russell): The metropolitan Glasgow strategic drainage partnership involves a number of bodies including seven local authorities, Scottish Water, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency and Scottish Enterprise, all of which are contributing to its aims. The Scottish Government is represented on the project board with observer status and I am being kept abreast of progress as the project builds.

Charlie Gordon: What steps will the minister take to ensure that the water infrastructure that is required to meet the commitments to the Commonwealth games and Clyde gateway projects is provided in line with the timescales for those projects?

Michael Russell: As Mr Gordon is aware, it is important that that part of the plan is implemented before some other parts. I visited the strategic drainage partnership some months ago and was shown the work that requires to be done in that part of Glasgow.

The leaflet that the strategic drainage partnership published recently starts to set out what will be required in relation to its overall plan. No approach has been made to the Government yet in respect of support for that, but obviously it will have to be considered as the plans go forward. The Government recognises that Scottish Water in particular will play a significant role in achieving the strategic drainage partnership's medium and long-term objectives. We will have to consider carefully the future investment objectives for Scottish Water to ensure that it can make the

appropriate contribution to meeting the challenges that lie ahead.

The project is undoubtedly a major one. The draft national planning framework identifies it as a national priority. As Mr Gordon knows from his experience, it deals with the replacement of a drainage infrastructure that is more than 100 years old and which, in some places, is worn out. The opportunities are great, and the first opportunity is to properly service the Commonwealth games site.

Bluetongue Virus

6. Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what action it is taking to minimise the risk of an outbreak of the bluetongue virus in Scotland. (S3O-3647)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment (Richard Lochhead): The Scottish Government is working in partnership with stakeholders to minimise the risk that the disease will spread to Scotland in the near future. A key risk is the movement of animals from high-risk areas. The industry is discouraging animal keepers from sourcing stock from high-risk areas and the Scottish Government has put in place arrangements to monitor any such movements to Scotland.

Vaccination will be a valuable tool in protecting Scotland's livestock industry. The Scottish Government is in the process of securing vaccine on behalf of stakeholders at the best possible cost.

Elaine Murray: The cabinet secretary is aware that a case of bluetongue was detected in Dumfries and Galloway at the end of last year in a herd of animals that was imported from Germany. With the Scottish midge season well under way and the import of vaccinated animals into Scotland likely to increase in the next few weeks, what steps are ministers taking to ensure that all farmers are aware of their responsibility to notify the authorities of stock movements? Is the minister confident that sufficient vaccine will be available to Scottish farmers early enough should the worst happen?

Richard Lochhead: I assure the member that there is constant communication on bluetongue and the protection of Scotland between the Scottish Government and all our stakeholders, and indeed directly with farmers and people with holdings in Scotland. The most important measure to protect Scotland continues to be for farmers to be careful about where they source their livestock, to remain vigilant for signs of disease, and to report any suspicions immediately. Many farmers throughout Scotland have reported suspicions in recent weeks. Thankfully, all those cases were negative, but that shows that farmers are indeed being vigilant.

A great deal of legislation has been put in place to ensure that farmers who could pose a risk to Scotland with some of their activities are held to account. From tomorrow, Friday 6 June, a new bluetongue amendment order will be in place to provide for the compulsory vaccination campaign in Scotland late in the year. It also requires animals coming into Scotland from a bluetongue-restricted zone under vaccination conditions to be accompanied by a veterinary certificate to prove that they have been vaccinated. Other requirements are also in place.

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): The cabinet secretary is well aware that the tendering process for purchasing bluetongue vaccine was due to be completed by the end of May. Is that process complete? If it is, which company will supply the vaccine, and will it be available in three to four weeks if required? Will the cabinet secretary also say whether pillar 2 funding will be available next year and the year after to purchase further vaccine should it be required? If pillar 2 funding is not available, how does he propose to fund vaccines in future years?

Richard Lochhead: The vaccine procurement process has successfully been completed, and I will receive advice in the coming days about which vaccine best serves Scotland's needs. There has never been a commitment that the vaccine will be made available in the next three or four weeks, but I hope that it will be made available sooner rather than later.

On funding, the Scottish Government made a unique contribution of either up to £3 million or 50 per cent of the cost of the manufactured vaccine. That has been warmly welcomed by all stakeholders in Scotland, and it is of course £3 million more than has been contributed for vaccination elsewhere in the United Kingdom. That is a one-off contribution—a joint agreement was signed with all stakeholders in Scotland, and the situation is fully understood. The industry will continue to carry the costs thereafter.

Loch Lomond (Byelaws)

7. Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive whether the Minister for Environment will report on the effectiveness of the byelaws applicable to Loch Lomond. (S3O-3615)

The Minister for Environment (Michael Russell): The Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Authority is responsible for monitoring the Loch Lomond byelaws.

As the member knows—she is well aware of what happens in the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs national park—the revised byelaws were introduced only in May 2007, and one season is insufficient to draw firm conclusions

about long-term effectiveness. The park authority has two strands to applying the byelaws: a preventive approach, which aims to raise awareness about the byelaws and the speed reduction areas, and dealing with byelaw contraventions when they occur.

I recognise that changing behaviour is a long-term goal, and the park authority needs to continue to monitor the results before we can show whether trends are desirable.

Jackie Baillie: The minister may be aware of the increase in the violation of speeding laws since the new byelaws were introduced, especially in relation to jet-skis. However, it would appear that, of the almost 300 speeding violations last year, only one report was made to the procurator fiscal, and we are unclear whether that was taken to prosecution.

I agree with the minister that education can change behaviour. Does he agree with me that enforcement has a significant role to play? Will he therefore send a strong signal to irresponsible visitors to Loch Lomond by confirming the need for enforcement action on the loch?

Michael Russell: I am happy to go along with the member and send that signal. It is important that the byelaws are observed. They exist not as decoration, but because they are required.

However, it is important to point out that enforcement is taking place vigorously. For example, operation ironworks was launched in March 2008. It is a partnership among Central Scotland Police, Strathclyde Police, Tayside Police, the national park authority and the Forestry Commission Scotland. It is a six-month operation that is aimed at tackling antisocial behaviour of all types, and it covers the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs national park. The operation aims to promote responsible behaviour in the countryside and to deter antisocial behaviour and criminal offences being committed.

During the six months of the operation, there will be 42 different initiatives targeting issues such as speeding, parking, traffic, litter offences, theft, vandalism and noise disturbance. High-visibility patrols will be carried out by officers on bikes, as well as officers from the road policing unit, the dog section and the underwater search unit. A mobile police office will be in evidence.

I am sure that members will be pleased to know that, as part of operation ironworks, a camper has just been fined for taking a chainsaw to a 30-year-old tree. Although that was not a speeding offence, the case indicates the seriousness with which we take all such matters.

Waste (Lothian and Borders)

8. George Foulkes (Lothians) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what progress has been made since Scottish Government support for Lothian and Borders area waste team was withdrawn; how local authorities in the Lothians will meet European Union targets in respect of diversion from landfill, and whether the Scottish Government will accept full liability for any fines imposed should they not meet such targets. (S3O-3626)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment (Richard Lochhead): I met the Edinburgh, Lothians and Borders councils on 21 May. Progress continues to be made on recycling in those councils and across Scotland. European Union targets can be met by waste prevention, recycling and composting and the appropriate use of technologies. I am reviewing the landfill allowance scheme with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities.

George Foulkes: The cabinet secretary has not answered the last part of my question. If any EU fines are imposed, will the Government accept its responsibility and pay the fines?

Richard Lochhead: All councils, the Scottish Government and, I am sure, everyone in the chamber accept that the targets that we must achieve are challenging. The targets have been challenging for the past few years, not only for the past 12 months. I had meetings, which were much more constructive than the member's contribution, with the Edinburgh, Lothians and Borders councils. I am encouraged by the progress that they are very keen to make in the best attempt possible to meet those ambitious targets, which are good for Scotland's environment.

Point of Order

14:56

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. On 24 April, the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning, Fiona Hyslop, informed Parliament that, with regard to national qualifications and baccalaureates for science and languages:

"I will provide further details of the baccalaureate later in the session."—[*Official Report*, 24 April 2008; c 7870.]

Members in the chamber assumed that that announcement would be made to the Parliament and that they would be afforded an opportunity to question the proposals and scrutinise them in detail.

This morning, outwith the Parliament, at a conference in Stirling, the cabinet secretary—[*Interruption.*] If the ministers—

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): I will decide what is in order, Mr Purvis—please continue. I ask for silence from front-bench members.

Jeremy Purvis: The cabinet secretary made the proposals public at a conference in Stirling. A press release was issued with a 9.30 am embargo. At 9.11 am, the convener of the Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee was e-mailed a letter, which was dated Thursday 5 June. The letter states:

"I will be announcing further details of the awards on Thursday 5 June and wish to ensure that the Committee is aware of my plans."

Presiding Officer, is it a courtesy to members for them to get notice of such a significant announcement 19 minutes ahead of the press being able to comment on it and report it publicly? What constitutes a significant announcement that should be made in the chamber to allow members an opportunity to ask questions of ministers? Finally, will you rule on whether it is appropriate that the clerks of our committees will be under a considerable burden to contact the convener, ask for permission for other members to be notified and allow all members of the Scottish Parliament to have the information?

When a public statement is to be made shortly after 9.30 am and an e-mail is sent at 9.11 am, it is nigh on impossible for all members of the Parliament to be notified appropriately of such a significant announcement. If, in the future, the Government sneaks in such announcements in accordance with the bare minimum of what is required, our clerks will become an arm of the Government's communications department

instead of providing a service to members of this Parliament.

The Presiding Officer: I thank the member for giving me rather brief notice—although that was not his fault—of the point of order. I have not—[*Interruption.*] May I have some order while I say what I wish to say? I have not had the opportunity to consider the matter in great detail, but I refer the member to the "Good Practice Guidance by the Presiding Officer on Announcements by the Scottish Government", which sets out a number of methods by which the Government can make announcements to the Parliament. It is for the Government to decide which of those methods is the most appropriate in the circumstances, but I always hope that the Government will do so only after careful consideration of the position of the Parliament.

I would like to give Mr Purvis's final point further consideration this afternoon, and I will come back to the chamber at decision time to say something further on that point.

Scotland's Infrastructure (Investment)

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): The next item of business is a debate on motion S3M-2057, in the name of John Swinney, on investment in Scottish infrastructure. I remind members that all contributions should be made through the chair, which means that members should refer to other members by their name or preferred title.

14:59

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): Today's debate follows my appearance last Tuesday before the Finance Committee and my parliamentary statement last Wednesday about infrastructure investment and the role of the Scottish futures trust. Nevertheless, I welcome a third opportunity to air these issues, because we have £14 billion-worth of good news on infrastructure investment to debate in Parliament today and a Scottish futures trust that will allow this Government to deliver more infrastructure bang for the Scottish people's buck. I also welcome today's debate because it gives the Government a third opportunity to highlight not only the excessive profits that the previous Administration allowed to develop from hospital and other capital projects but the fact that the people of Scotland have been left to pay the price.

Andy Kerr (East Kilbride) (Lab): Much of the research on which the cabinet secretary relies with regard to these so-called excessive profits comes from an academic called Allyson Pollock, who said in an article entitled "A new name can't save a poor policy" that the Scottish futures trust model is "not so much an alternative"

as a hybrid of the private finance initiative. Does the cabinet secretary agree that her criticism of the previous PFI model, which the cabinet secretary agrees with, applies to his own model?

John Swinney: I am determined to deliver a model that guarantees the Scottish public value for money in the infrastructure projects that are brought forward and ensures that we get the required infrastructure improvements in a way that does not deliver the excessive profits that were delivered by the previous Administration.

Our decision to commit to record infrastructure investment is an important part of our ambition to build a more successful country with higher levels of sustainable economic growth. It is also a central part of our social democratic contract with the people of Scotland, in which growing wealth will be matched by the provision of the kind of 21st

century public services that the people of this country have the right to expect.

Because we recognise the critical contribution that infrastructure investment makes to economic growth, we have raised public funding for direct public sector investment over the spending review 2007 period to its highest ever level. Under our plans, there will be investment of £14 billion over the next three years, and of a projected £35 billion over the next 10 years. We have done all that despite the fact that, at a time when record revenues are flowing into the United Kingdom exchequer from off Scotland's shores, the Labour Party has chosen to give Scotland the smallest increase in our budget since devolution.

Our infrastructure plan sets out the physical assets that we believe are needed to grow the economy and to support high-quality public services. We will work with the public and private sectors to deliver this ambitious programme for the people of Scotland.

Jackson Carlaw (West of Scotland) (Con): The First Minister has stated that East Renfrewshire Council, which is as experienced as anyone at managing these financial models, has indicated its willingness to act as a pilot for any new scheme. On Monday, my colleague Murdo Fraser and I visited Eastwood high school and met the headmaster and a senior council official, who appear ready and willing. Is the cabinet secretary prepared to consider the replacement of that school, which is an urgent matter, as a suitable scheme for an SFT pilot and to meet those concerned?

John Swinney: As Mr Carlaw will know, in its submission to the Government's consultation on the Scottish futures trust, East Renfrewshire Council expressed an aspiration to be very much involved in developing the model and to be part of a pilot project. I am happy to consider that proposal and to discuss the issue with East Renfrewshire Council—and, indeed, Mr Carlaw—in our preparations for setting up the Scottish futures trust.

Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind): The cabinet secretary referred to the need to get the best possible return on the Government's investment and the best possible infrastructure for Scotland. At the moment, a tram system is being constructed in Edinburgh that I suggest is for the benefit not merely of that city but of Scotland. The traders who have been affected by those works are actually experiencing a double squeeze: the expected one and an unexpected one caused by the credit crunch and the state of the British economy. Given the scheme's importance, is the cabinet secretary amenable to funding additional compensation for those traders who can demonstrate particular levels of hardship, using as

a comparator the results of the City of Edinburgh Council's baseline research into the effects of the credit crunch—

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): That intervention is long enough. I am sure that the cabinet secretary gets the point.

John Swinney: I certainly do, Presiding Officer. As I said either last week or the week before in response to an oral parliamentary question from Malcolm Chisholm, if the City of Edinburgh Council determines that individual traders are suffering hardship because of certain circumstances, the Government has an obligation to support 75 per cent of additional business rates relief. I have confirmed that on the record and will be happy to honour that commitment.

I gently point out to my dear colleague Margo MacDonald that the Government did not jump at the opportunity to support the trams project, so others in the Parliament should perhaps have broad enough shoulders to accept the financial implications for traders in the city.

The Scottish futures trust is central to our plans, because at its core is the ability that it will give us to deliver more for our money. It will allow us to proceed with an ambitious capital programme; to maximise the opportunity to deliver greater value and greater impact; to bring the public sector together to produce excellent infrastructure that meets the needs of our people; to put a new focus on sustainability, through the provision of new and energy-efficient buildings; and to provide wider benefits for the Scottish economy.

As the infrastructure investment plan makes clear, over the next three years there are numerous opportunities for new investment, including opportunities for new private investment in buildings and road projects amounting to more than £3 billion.

Marilyn Livingstone (Kirkcaldy) (Lab): Will the minister take an intervention?

John Swinney: I had better make a bit more progress, but I will give way later.

The Government has brought forward a strong pipeline of projects to invest in the infrastructure of Scotland, the progress of which will be accelerated and enhanced by the introduction of the Scottish futures trust. The Government has made it clear that we view the SFT as the correct model to succeed the private finance initiative.

The use of the PFI model on a project-by-project basis does not provide best value for the taxpayer. Excessive profits have been made as a result of huge returns on small investments when the significant risk that projects supposedly carried has not materialised. Over the next three years, the unitary charge payment for such profits will

rise from £500 million to nearly £800 million a year, which represents an increase of 60 per cent, while our budget will increase by an average of 1.4 per cent a year in real terms.

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): Will the minister give way on that point?

John Swinney: Out of courtesy, I had better give way to Marilyn Livingstone, as I said that I would.

Marilyn Livingstone: I tried to intervene when the cabinet secretary was talking about capital programmes. My question will not surprise him. Will the new Forth crossing be built using the SFT?

John Swinney: The Government has made it clear that we will set out the procurement and financing options for the Forth replacement crossing later this year. We took the early decisions that were required to provide certainty that the crossing would be constructed and, as we promised Parliament that we would, we will set out the financing and procurement options in an orderly fashion in the course of 2008.

Following my announcement last month, we are developing our plans to set up the Scottish futures trust. That work is progressing well and the trust will be established over the summer. It will then begin work with our local authority partners on their key areas of need. As I have told members on previous occasions, by learning lessons from previous PFI contracts, the SFT will reduce the cost of funding and deliver more effective investment in planning, procurement and delivery. There will be no repeat of horror stories such as that which surrounded the equity return at Hairmyres.

As one funding option, the SFT will enable us to offer a Scotland-wide municipal bond to fund infrastructure projects. We will develop that proposal with our local authority partners. As a centre of expertise for infrastructure investment in Scotland, the SFT will, as the business case demonstrates, have the ability to release between £100 million and £150 million each year for increased investment in infrastructure through greater partnership, improved management and better-value finance.

The SFT is different from, and better than, PFI in three ways. First, it will have at its core the non-profit-distributing model of finance. Secondly, it will be Scotland's centre of excellence for infrastructure delivery and will provide a level of expertise in developing projects and negotiating contracts that is not currently available to many smaller public bodies and local authorities. Thirdly, the pooling of projects will result in efficiencies in

delivery, risk and finance that, together, will result in savings.

As part of the SFT's early activities, we will maximise value for the public sector by establishing the key strengths to deliver better-quality and more consistent infrastructure investment. We will deliver new health facilities in our communities through the hub pathfinders and, as part of the infrastructure investment programme, we will improve the delivery and funding of schools, housing, waste facilities and flood defences. The Government is determined to ensure that the aggregation of projects will allow us to bring together expertise on clusters of projects, which will allow us to deliver more value and greater impact for the people of Scotland.

The Scottish futures trust is part of an ambitious programme of capital investment from the Government. We have set out in our infrastructure investment plan the largest capital programme ever. The projects in that plan are being delivered today. More are planned and more are in the pipeline. The Government is putting in place the foundation of a significant capital programme and it wants to work with the public and private sectors to ensure that programme's success.

The Scottish futures trust is central to the ambition to make Scotland a more successful country. *[Interruption.]* Instead of muttering on the sidelines, Lord Foulkes might come to endorse that ambition one day. The development of projects is under way in every part of our country.

I move,

That the Parliament notes the publication of *Taking Forward the Scottish Futures Trust* and the £14 billion of infrastructure investment set out in the Scottish Government's Infrastructure Investment Plan; believes that it is important to ensure maximum value for the public purse from infrastructure investment and welcomes efforts to deliver better value, and further notes that 14 possible options for work to be carried out under the umbrella of the Scottish Futures Trust (SFT) were identified and will be the subject of further development before being brought back to the Parliament.

15:10

Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): Hemingway used to tell would-be writers to start by writing one true sentence, so here is one true sentence from the cabinet secretary's statement on infrastructure investment last week:

"My priority as Scotland's finance minister is to get best value and the best deal for Scottish taxpayers ... whether the investment comes from private or public sources."—*[Official Report, 28 May 2008; c 9005.]*

Surely that is true, but that was also true of all of Mr Swinney's predecessor finance ministers.

When previous Executives undertook eight major hospital projects, four were built with traditional public sector finance and four were built by public-private partnerships, because delivering the service was always more important than any dogmatic adherence to a financial model. That is why, in my constituency of East Lothian, six high schools were refurbished under public-private partnership but two brand-new primary schools were delivered through traditional finance. That is how a new or refurbished school was delivered every week between 2003 and 2007. The best deal was obtained, whether the investment came from public or private sources.

Mr Swinney's statement places him squarely in the same infrastructure procurement camp as all his predecessors, no matter how he tries to pretend otherwise. The Scottish futures trust's purpose is to allow him to pretend otherwise. The Scottish National Party told us that it would end PPP and that it would build schools and hospitals with public, not private, money. The SNP said that no one should make any profit from vital infrastructure for health and education services. Now, that means only no excessive profits and obtaining the best deal, wherever the investment comes from.

Mr Swinney tells us that the non-profit-distributing model is at the core of the Scottish futures trust, but that is simply a version of PPP, which Argyll and Bute Council used first to build schools and which was agreed to, facilitated and launched by Mr Peacock. Last week, the cabinet secretary told the Finance Committee:

"NPD models are part of the family of public-private partnerships".—*[Official Report, Finance Committee, 27 May 2008; c 578.]*

He tried to say that PPP is a generic term that covers PFI, which is bad, and NPD, which is good, but that is rubbish. The Bank of Scotland has said:

"the projects, on which this assertion is based, are those ... amongst the first PFI projects ... when the market was embryonic ... The current PPP market is significantly different. It ... has attracted ... numerous bidders and investors who, in order to remain competitive in bidding projects, reduced their return target levels".

PPP schemes were a vast improvement on PFI projects and NPD is a version of PPP that builds in the profit at the start. If it looks like a duck, walks like a duck and quacks like a duck, it is a duck.

However, the NPD model might be an ugly duckling. As far back as 2003, the Institute for Public Policy Research said that the NPD model would generate more profit, not less, because banks and subcontractors would charge more for assuming risks that the special purpose vehicle would handle in other models.

As recently as this year, the Bank of Scotland said:

"it is less clear ... whether this model will attract sufficient numbers of potential"

bidders

"to ensure that there will be competition".

That situation is happening now. Mr Swinney has used NHS Tayside's mental health developments project as an example of his NPD model in action, but he has not mentioned that one bidder for that project has withdrawn. In evidence to the Finance Committee, Canmore Partnership Ltd stated:

"Not only do we regard the Government's position as unfair, it is also inconsistent".

It also stated that the Government's NPD model would

"limit bidders' appetite for such projects."

It pointed out that the project now has only two interested parties and drew a comparison with a similar scheme in East Sussex that had far less attractive project fundamentals but 11 bidders.

John Swinney: The member makes a point about the availability of bidders for the NPD model. Will he reflect on the fact that the tendering process for the Highland schools PFI project ended up with one bidder? What does that say about the model to which he is so attached?

Iain Gray: It says that there may be a shared problem, which is not surprising, because the cabinet secretary's model is a PPP model. We must make projects more attractive to attract more bidders.

The Scottish futures trust is PPP. The only people who are fooling themselves about that are SNP members. It is for them that the whole charade of the past year has taken place. It is for them that Mr Swinney is still ducking and diving, trying to pretend that the Scottish futures trust is what it was meant to be when the SNP promised it in 2006. At that time, the SNP leadership was in no doubt. Nicola Sturgeon told us that finance would be raised through bond issues, which would crowd out PPP. It took Mr Swinney the best part of seven months to turn that statement into a consultation document, which, when it appeared in December, was not widely welcomed, as he has sometimes claimed, but widely laughed out of court. The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities said that the model would not work; the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers said that local authorities could not afford it; the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy said that it would cost more; Audit Scotland was worried that it broke accounting rules; and investors said that they were

baffled as to why anyone would invest in it. They all said that it made no sense.

When the follow-up document "Taking forward the Scottish Futures Trust" appeared, we discovered that

"details of how investment will be raised ... has not been explored in any detail"

and that bonds are just one of 14 possible ways in which finance might be raised. The SFT is not moving forward but is in full-scale retreat. That would matter little if the future of Scotland were not at stake.

Here is another true sentence from last week's statement. The cabinet secretary said:

"Infrastructure investment is vital for Scotland's economic growth and the provision of excellent public services."

Amen to that. However, we have seen the rail link to Edinburgh airport cancelled, the Aberdeen western peripheral route delayed, the Waverley line delayed and calls for investment in digital infrastructure rejected out of hand.

Last week the cabinet secretary said:

"the certainty of our investment plans is a particular strength in these times of ... troubled markets."—[*Official Report*, 28 May 2008; c 9005, 9006.]

That is just complacency. The Bank of Scotland states:

"The current situation means ... that there is, in effect, no Scottish market to speak of."

It goes on:

"current lack of clarity over infrastructure delivery in Scotland has caused a number of the major PPP players to view Scotland as a place where it will be increasingly difficult to do business. Some have already stated they will not seek to bid any more projects here".

According to *The Sunday Times*, "Salmond trusts plan will drive out Scottish firms".

The cabinet secretary comes before us to excuse the inexcusable. It is inexcusable that, while he thrashes about, schools, hospitals and transport infrastructure that should be built are not being built, capital investment on which economic growth depends is stuttering, and the investment and construction communities are losing patience and interest.

Nothing symbolises the Government's confusion more than the Forth bridge project. The Liberal amendment is right to draw attention to the matter, because it is an iconic project. The First Minister knew that when he promised that it would be built using patriotic bonds. We know that it will not, but we do not know how it will be built. We suspect that Mr Swinney does not know either. I am old enough to remember the days when people crossed the Forth in a small car ferry. If Scotland must wait for the Government to sort out one or

other of the 14 possible ways in which it might finance the bridge, we could find ourselves taking to the Forth in boats again. Scotland's investment community will be looking to invest in small roll-on, roll-off ferries rather than the construction of a new bridge. After all, at least the ferries floated—the Scottish futures trust does not. It is not just holed below the water line—the ship has sunk, and captain Swinney and his crew are in the lifeboat PPP. They should admit that, get over it and get on with building the schools, hospitals and bridges that Scotland wants.

I move amendment S3M-2057.3, to insert at end:

"notes the comments of the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth acknowledging that his priority is to get best value and the best deal for taxpayers whether that investment comes from private or public sources and welcomes the statement on page 7 of the strategic business case which provides for guidance, structuring and compliance for ongoing non-profit distribution (NPD)/PPP programmes, firmly placing PPP at the heart of the Scottish Government's strategy, and believes that in the interests of Scotland and its people it is now time to end the confusion surrounding the SFT, admit that it is based on the same principles as those proven financial models which have delivered new schools and hospitals and that it is time to restart the building of schools, hospitals and the transport infrastructure."

15:20

Derek Brownlee (South of Scotland) (Con): In the unfortunate circumstance that we end up relying on ferries over the Forth, I hope that there is at least a free market and proper competition in the ferry market on this side of the country.

My amendment has a number of themes. We want recognition that a range of options ought to be available for capital investment, rather than there being overreliance on a single model. The choice of the most appropriate financing model must be made in the interests of taxpayers and service users rather than be based on ideology. That might be the Government's direction of travel, given that the Scottish futures trust now has 14 potential ways in which to operate.

We know that the Scottish Government rejects forms of PFI where there is potential for equity profit, and prefers instead the capped-profit route offered by the non-profit-distributing model. The Conservatives have no objection to equity profits, because the objective ought to be to deliver better value for taxpayers, not to minimise any element of profits to the private sector. If the private sector can make a profit while delivering good-value services, we should welcome it. Removing profit does not automatically lead to a saving to the public purse.

Jeremy Purvis: I understand what Derek Brownlee is saying, but does he agree that there

could be equity profit schemes that are non-profit-distributing organisations? In fact, such organisations could reinvest those profits in other building and infrastructure projects, which is similar to the building environment that we have in the private sector. The cabinet secretary is also incorrect to say that there will be no equity profits under NPD schemes.

Derek Brownlee: The cabinet secretary may be correct in some circumstances, but the broader point is that no matter what form of procurement is used, the private sector will make a profit. In conventional procurement, where costs overrun, it will probably make a bigger profit than it intended, at an extra cost to the taxpayer. In contrast, with PPP or PFI, it achieves a profit not by cost overruns or delays but by reducing costs and delivering better efficiency. Refinancing gains are shared with the taxpayer.

Ministers have trumpeted the new Southern general hospital in Glasgow. How much of that £850 million of public money will go in private profit? The architects, builders and suppliers will make a profit. Everyone involved in the project will make a profit, and that profit will be taxed, which is how we pay for hospitals in the first place. We should not be afraid of profit, because without it there would be no new hospitals or schools or anything else.

Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP): Does the member agree that the key issue is excessive profit? Even under the traditional method of the Public Works Loan Board, the people lending the money still make a profit, but they do not make an excessive profit and they provide value to the taxpayer.

Derek Brownlee: It all depends on what one defines as excessive. The benchmark that I normally use is the number of appearances that Mr Neil makes on "Newsnight".

We have no ideological preference for PFI or PPP over any other mechanism. To be fair, there are some legitimate concerns about some of the older PFI contracts. In England, many of the PFI contracts in the national health service that were signed within the past decade are being called into question because of a Government-backed move away from hospital care. That just shows the dangers in some cases of signing up to long, inflexible contracts. Much can change in 25 or 30 years, although I know that some things do not. We had a discredited, failing Labour Government on the way out 30 years ago as well.

There is a lack of clarity on the final shape of the Scottish futures trust, and we want to hear more about it from ministers after the summer recess, and until decisions are made on its final shape. We also want the Government to consider the

concerns that have been raised about some of the refinancing provisions in the current NPD models, and in particular the way in which the independent directors could exercise the discretion to refinance. It ought to be possible to deal with the legitimate concerns without prejudicing the broader aims of NPD projects. We ask the Government to think carefully about that.

Finally, we want the Government to produce a framework to enable objective comparisons to be made of different funding models. For example, Audit Scotland has criticised some aspects of the current public sector comparator. Beyond that, there is a broader issue, because at present it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to monitor all relevant costs on a whole-life basis across all construction and procurement methods. That should change.

We have long said that the new Forth crossing ought to be put in place soon. On the Liberal Democrat amendment, we have to ask whether the delay of six months, at most, between the promised statement to Parliament on the funding method for the Forth bridge and the timetable that the Liberal Democrats propose would lead to a delay in the date of the new bridge's opening. Given the long delays that have already occurred in relation to the Forth bridge, we do not think that there is any evidence that that is likely.

The Liberal Democrat amendment also mentions bonds. Many of the people who have criticised the role of bonds have pointed out that, where they are successful, such as in the United States of America, they are tax free, whereas in Scotland they would not be. However, the Government has today confirmed that it has the power to reduce the council tax of bond holders by an amount equivalent to the income tax that they would pay on their interest. That would allow the Scottish Government to make local government bonds more attractive. However, the Government could not do that under the local income tax proposals, because there would be no tax and interest generally. My advice in that regard is simple: to save the Scottish futures trust, all that the Government needs to do is ditch the local income tax.

I move amendment S3M-2057.1, to insert at end:

"believes that a broad range of public and private options should be available for capital investment by public bodies and that the public sector should seek appropriate provisions in the best interests of taxpayers; calls on ministers to report to the Parliament on progress after the summer recess and regularly thereafter until the final range of options and shape of the SFT has been confirmed; calls on the Scottish Government to finalise the details of the SFT as soon as possible and, as part of its work on the SFT, to review how refinancing provisions in non-profit distributing models might be amended to ensure that they

achieve intended aims without discouraging investment, and calls on the Scottish Government to develop and publish a robust investment option-appraisal framework capable of producing comparable information on whole-life costs for future projects regardless of which method of procurement or operation is used."

15:26

Liam McArthur (Orkney) (LD): Liberal Democrats welcome the debate, having consistently argued for ministers to be held to account by Parliament on the Government's Scottish futures trust proposals. Last week's statement from the cabinet secretary was unsatisfactory—a re-heating of fare that had already been served up to a noticeably underwhelmed audience at Heriot-Watt University the week before.

However, today, yet again, the cabinet secretary has failed to answer the many and fundamental questions that beset his ill-fated Scottish futures trust. There remains more than a suspicion that, as HBOS has said, ministers are more concerned with political dogma than with the efficient delivery of a major public investment programme that involves schools, hospitals and transport projects.

At least we have heard a grudging acceptance by the cabinet secretary that achieving the Government's stated objectives will require significant levels of private investment. Perhaps, in time, we will even get an acknowledgement that the private sector should expect to receive a return on such investment, or, in other words, that there will be—some of Mr Swinney's back-bench colleagues might wish to cover their ears at this point—private profit. Of course, the cabinet secretary knows that there will be private profit. In fairness, he probably has done for some time. However, for the sake of party unity, it remains the concept that hardly dare speak its name.

Progress has been made, nonetheless. In recent months, members of the Finance Committee have been treated to vintage Alex Neil as he has fulminated against PPP/PFI. In committee, he has not yet roused himself to the same lather of indignation that saw him denounce PPP/PFI to the *Sunday Herald* as "morally criminal", but he has left no one in any doubt about his desire to see PPP/PFI scrapped completely.

Sadly for Mr Neil, his script has been rewritten for him. Last week, Mr Swinney told an interested Finance Committee—and a presumably flabbergasted Mr Neil—that the preferred non-profit-distributing model was

"part of the family of public-private partnerships".—[*Official Report, Finance Committee*, 27 May 2008; c578.]

Interestingly, in his statements last week and today, Mr Swinney erased all mention of PPP.

However, he is right—regardless of the doubts that Mr Neil might still harbour. NPD is part of what the Finance Committee has been told repeatedly in evidence-taking sessions is the evolution of PPP/PFI.

The witnesses who gave that evidence have been equally clear that PPP/PFI continues to have an important role to play. NPD, for all its undeniable benefits, will not be suitable in every case, notably where risks are high. The Government's decision to rule out PPP/PFI has already created disquiet and uncertainty in the private sector. Importantly, the decision also prevents the Government from securing best value for the taxpayer where the PPP/PFI model best fits the needs of the project.

Nowhere is that uncertainty more obvious or potentially damaging than in respect of the new Forth bridge. After more than a year in government, ministers appear to have absolutely no idea how they will fund the single largest and most iconic infrastructure project in Scotland. Alex Salmond's much vaunted—by him, at least—patriotic bond has been ruled out as illegal, which he must have known it would be when he made that promise. Further, as the Finance Committee has been told consistently, the NPD model is better suited to less risky projects. It is self-evidently not appropriate for the largest and most risky civil engineering project in Scotland for decades. Meanwhile, the cabinet secretary has failed to convince anyone that his idea of municipal bonds will swell to fill the void. That includes COSLA, which has described the futures trust proposals as “a joke”.

Serious questions are now being asked about how the Government proposes to fund the new crossing. With a price tag of £4 billion, there is growing suspicion that ministers will be forced down the route of tolling to make up the shortfall. At the weekend, the cabinet secretary told “The Politics Show”:

“we've said we're not taking forward a proposal based on tolling”.

When that is added to his earlier statement in the chamber that

“The Government is against tolling”,—[*Official Report*, 19 December 2007; c 4553.]

it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Mr Swinney is softening us up for a U-turn. He says that he is against tolls and that his final proposals may not be based on tolls. However, he has so far conspicuously failed to rule out the use of tolls at all.

Joe FitzPatrick (Dundee West) (SNP): In the light of Nick Clegg's announcement that the Liberal Democrats want to introduce road charging, can Mr McArthur tell us which roads in

Scotland would be tolled if the Lib Dems were in power?

Liam McArthur: It is interesting that Mr FitzPatrick seems to have overlooked the fact that his party is in government. What is going to happen to infrastructure projects in Scotland is a question for the Government to answer.

Even if Mr Swinney were to rule out tolls during the course of the debate, many questions would remain unanswered. The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change promised a decision on how the new Forth bridge would be funded by autumn 2007—a full eight months ago. Mr Swinney then kicked the decision into the autumn of this year so that

“early progress on the replacement crossing”—[*Official Report, Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee*, 2 October 2007; c 167.]

could be made. That deadline has now slipped to the end of the year—hence the problem that I have with Derek Brownlee's problem with our amendment. Given what has happened to the comprehensive energy strategy, no-one will be surprised if the Government soon proposes spring 2009 as decision day.

In opposition, the SNP promised urgency and new funding models; in government, its promises lie in tatters. I am reminded of the words of the formerly ubiquitous Fergus Ewing, who talked of Government being

“haunted by indecision and ineptitude”

and

“forced into a corner on the big decisions facing Scotland.”

In the interests of Scottish business and Fife residents—and, indeed, to give Mr Ewing peace of mind—I ask the cabinet secretary to recognise the need to bring urgent clarity to the Government's intentions in relation to the Forth bridge.

That need for urgent clarity is also why I have difficulty accepting the Tory amendment. It makes a number of reasonable points, as did Derek Brownlee, but it appears to amount to a resolute demand for the Government to “see how things go—but keep us posted, will you?” Mr Brownlee's willingness these days to offer a comforting embrace to Mr Swinney in his increasingly frequent hours of need is remarkable. In fact, the only thing I await with as much anticipation as the details of how the Government intends to fund the new Forth bridge is finding out whether Mr Brownlee has yet done enough to pip Alex Neil to the keys of the next available ministerial Mondeo. That is one to watch—mark my words.

Liberal Democrats make no apologies for focusing on the issue of the Forth bridge in today's debate. As Hamish McDonnell put it recently:

"Ministers are slowly starting to find out the difference between the superficial and the easy ... and the deeper, detailed and complicated policies which make a long term difference".

Clarity is needed.

I have pleasure in moving amendment S3M-2057.2, to insert at end:

"but notes that the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth promised the Parliament that a decision on the method of financing for the new Forth crossing would be made in Autumn 2007; is concerned that eight months later no decision has been taken; further notes that the First Minister's preferred method of issuing "patriotic bonds" has been dismissed as illegal and the non-profit distribution model is considered inappropriate for high risk projects, and therefore calls on the Scottish Government to make a statement to the Parliament setting out method of funding, management arrangements and timetable for procurement of the new Forth crossing before the summer recess."

15:32

Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP): I find it strange that Mr McArthur puts so much stress on the Forth road bridge. When his colleague Tavish Scott was Minister for Transport—and Mr McArthur was a special adviser—in the previous Administration, we got no commitment to any Forth crossing during eight years. The Liberal Democrats should look in the mirror.

Liam McArthur: Will the member give way?

Alex Neil: I will in a wee minute—I will give you time to recover.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I remind Mr Neil about the rules on addressing members through the chair.

Alex Neil: Absolutely—I apologise. I should address Mr McArthur through you, Presiding Officer. I will give him time to recover.

I will start on a consensual point, as usual. We all agree that major investment in Scotland's infrastructure is a prerequisite to achieving our key objective of boosting economic growth, and to ensuring that we have a smart, successful Scotland and that we are a competitor in tomorrow's world. We recognise that 10 per cent of the Scottish Government's budget for the next four years is already allocated to capital investment. That 10 per cent, however, is not enough in itself. We need funding above and beyond that, and the question in this debate is how best to fund additional capital investment above and beyond that which has been committed from the Government's revenue.

Iain Gray's speech highlighted the intellectual vacuum at the heart of new Labour. I will consider the various models for borrowing money for capital projects in the public sector, starting with the

model that has been around the longest: the Public Works Loans Board.

The Public Works Loans Board borrows private money on behalf of the Government to fund capital projects. It has done that for more than 200 years and will no doubt continue to do it for another 200 years. Nobody in the Scottish National Party—or, I suspect, in any other party—has any objection to the fact that the board goes to the market to raise the money. The important point is that it raises that money on the basis of value for money for the taxpayer, paying the minimum amount, not the kind of return that has been paid on the Edinburgh royal infirmary project, for example, in which private equity of £500,000 produced a return of £168 million for the equity holders. That cannot be called value for money for the taxpayer; it is simply profiteering at the taxpayer's expense.

Andy Kerr: Will Alex Neil give way?

Alex Neil: I always take people in turn, so I must let Mr McArthur in first.

Liam McArthur: Does Alex Neil accept that an announcement that states that a bridge will be built but which contains no detail about how that will be achieved, funded or managed is not so much ambitious as fantastic? We need clarity on that, and we need it soon.

Alex Neil: We have clarity and will get clarity. More important, we will get a bridge. We would never have had a bridge had we waited for the Lib-Lab pact to deliver it.

If Scotland and the Scottish Parliament had Scotland's share of Scotland's oil, we would be able to build as many bridges as we liked over the Forth. That is why we are having the debate. Members might have seen a programme on the BBC last night that highlighted the fact that £230 billion-worth of revenue from North Sea oil has gone into the United Kingdom Treasury in the past 30 years. Even under the Liberal Democrat policy of sharing that revenue across the UK for investment in capital projects—a good Liberal Democrat policy—we in Scotland would have been far better off today than we are. We would not have needed to entertain PFI, PPP or anything else because we would have been able to fund our infrastructure almost entirely from oil revenues.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: One minute, Mr Neil.

Alex Neil: The great tragedy for Scotland is that we have to borrow money through PFI, but we would not need to do so if we had control over our own resources.

I had much more to say but, unfortunately, I have run out of time. [Applause.] Well, I have time enough to say that the difference between the

Scottish futures trust and the Lib-Lab PFI or PPP—or any other name that we want to give it—is that, with the Scottish futures trust, we will deliver infrastructure projects that are value for money. That is why the Tories can support us today. We are not in favour of excess profits; we are in favour reasonable profits in return for a good job well done.

15:38

Charlie Gordon (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab): Skills and infrastructure are the two most important things that a Government can provide to assist economic competitiveness, and I welcome the debate for that reason.

John Swinney needs help with infrastructure investment, but not from Alex Neil. I had quite a bit of experience in the matter before I came to the Parliament because, over the years, I have been involved in the procurement and delivery of a number of roads, transport, water, housing and schools projects. Indeed, in the six years that I was leader of Glasgow City Council, the council built around 40 schools—29 of them over two years under a public-private partnership, and the remainder over about four years through what might be called the traditional route. I have continued to take a close interest in infrastructure since I came to the Parliament.

I welcome the fact that we have something called an infrastructure investment plan, which is a start. I notice, however, that there is a big elephant sitting in the corner: the new Forth bridge, which is not in there. Like everyone else, I wonder what the option will be chosen for financing that project.

There is a range of other challenges to be faced in delivering infrastructure projects. There are of course issues around financing. However, in all my time in office in Glasgow, not one Glaswegian complained to me that their new school was built through a PPP funding method and not some other method. Presumably, people regarded the method as entirely incidental.

There are finance, procurement, project management, capacity, asset maintenance and value-for-money issues. At the level of political management, the Scottish Government does not have an infrastructure minister to deliver the infrastructure plan. It is true that Stewart Stevenson is Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change, but he is just a part of John Swinney's vast empire, and no one is in control of all the infrastructure requirements—certainly, no one is in control of taking them all forward together. At the strategic level, Stewart Stevenson's ministry has officers and civil servants in a transport directorate, with other responsibilities being discharged by an executive

agency, Transport Scotland. The structures are not necessarily joined up to start with.

Procurement can be bedevilled by more than just arguments over finance models or the byzantine European Union rules that govern them. The contracting industry might not always react to tenders in the way that we, as their clients, might anticipate. A low tender bid might be a ploy to win a contract in relation to which the contractor intends to generate claims subsequently, whereas a shortage of competing tenders might necessitate an expensive shadow tendering exercise by the client, as was recently the case with the M74 completion project.

As for project management, I say only that members should look around them.

I turn to the problem that is caused by the finite capacity of the contracting industry. That is a challenge to the delivery of the existing infrastructure plan, never mind to the delivery of a beefed-up infrastructure plan, which some of us want to see. On 29 January this year, the chief executive of the Water Industry Commission for Scotland, Alan Sutherland, told the Parliament's Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee:

"a capital programme in the low £400 millions per year is more likely to be delivered efficiently over the medium to long term than one in the low £500 millions per year."—[*Official Report, Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee*, 29 January 2008; c 396.]

The chief executive was expressing severe doubts about whether Scottish Water could deliver its part of the programme, as contained in the plan. That is a major worry.

I move on to asset maintenance. A major but oft-ignored benefit can come from having a PPP project—or its close relative, the NDP-financed project. Such a project will usually provide for the maintenance of the newly created asset for a period of, typically, 30 years. In contrast, traditional procurement does not address such long-term issues. When savings are sought, road and buildings maintenance are often viewed as soft options.

If, like me, members want more and better infrastructure delivered more quickly, we need to work in a more joined-up way. That means more corporate working by ministers, questioning the silo structures of civil servants and executive agencies and seeking opportunities for synchronisation at the grass roots. On that latter point, I recall the Glasgow subway upgrade, during which fibre optic cables were installed—the spare capacity is now used by the city's universities. I was reminded of that this week when I came across the example of the Dundee firm that is putting fibre optic cables in that city's sewers.

Given that BT is balking at the cost of cabling the UK and that market forces might therefore fail Scotland's much-needed second generation of faster broadband infrastructure, ministers should pay close attention to the Dundee example.

Above all, the Scottish Government will be judged on the delivery of Scotland's infrastructure, and judged harshly if it fails.

15:45

Joe FitzPatrick (Dundee West) (SNP): I thank Charlie Gordon for acknowledging the innovation of Dundee business and industry—and some of the things that the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth is doing to deliver the Government's programme.

Today's debate illustrates perfectly that the Government is making improvements for the benefit of the people of Scotland and that the bitter Opposition is all over the place. Iain Gray says that the SFT is just PFI; Andy Gray—[*Laughter.*]—is on record attacking the NPD model in an interview with the finance convener of Falkirk Council; and Wendy Alexander claims that it was all Labour's idea anyway.

Andy Kerr: I speak as a former centre forward.

John Swinney: And a comedian.

Andy Kerr: Indeed. Talking of comedy, the SNP is always quoting the University of Edinburgh on PFI, PPP and other such things. Mark Hellowell of the University of Edinburgh said of the non-profit distributing model:

"Evidence suggests that this form of public-private partnership does not lead to lower levels of profit-making than PFI. On the Argyll and Bute grouped schools scheme, for example ... the ... rate of return ... was ... 15 per cent ... which is about the norm for ... PFI".

What is the difference?

Joe FitzPatrick: The big difference is that the NPD model will end the excessive profits, of which there are many examples under the standard PFI model. The evidence from Argyll and Bute Council and from Falkirk Council shows that with NPD there were no excessive profits to be made.

The SNP Government is committed to delivering record capital investment across Scotland. As the cabinet secretary said in his opening speech, £14 billion will be invested in infrastructure over the next three years, and £35 billion will be invested within a decade. Of that record investment, £2 billion will be invested in new and improved school buildings, including Kingspark school and Barnhill school in Dundee, both of which will be funded through traditional procurement using that record capital funding as part of the historic concordat with local government.

Members of the Opposition parties might not like to hear this, but our SNP Government will deliver 250 schools in the lifetime of this parliamentary session, which will match Labour's proposals brick for brick. However, in doing so, we will ensure that we get the maximum bang for the public pound.

Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): How many of those schools will be schools that were begun under the Labour-Liberal Democrat initiative and financed as part of PPP 2, as opposed to its successors?

Joe FitzPatrick: The Government took the decision that the quickest way of moving a few of those schools forward was to continue with the existing system. Where possible, they were transferred to the NPD model. I am confident that, in future, we will get much better value for the public pound through the Scottish futures trust.

The previous Administration had hoped that the Scottish people would never find out about the huge profits that private companies were making at the expense of the Scottish taxpayer as a result of the PFI programme. However, after the facts became available following a freedom of information request, we saw that the evidence was shocking. The *Sunday Herald* summed up the situation best when it labelled it "The great PFI swindle".

The evidence revealed for the first time the huge scale of the profits that were being made by private companies at the public's expense. We were told of regular profits of 1,200 per cent for private investors. That means that for every £1 invested, they got back £1,200. To put it another way, a modest investment of £1,000 delivered a return of £1 million. That is a scandal.

In 2006, the capital value of PFI projects in the NHS was £600 million, but the debt created was £2.4 billion. Even Labour members should be able to tell that that does not add up.

The huge sums of public money that were being handed over to private companies under PFI are a disgrace. One of the main justifications for those massive profits is the claim that, as part of PFI, risk is transferred. However, another national scandal is the projects that had to be bought out at a cost to the taxpayer of tens of millions of pounds: the Skye bridge, West Lothian College and Inverness airport. It is clear that for "risk" we can read "built-in profit." When a PFI project goes badly wrong, the public purse has to bear the cost.

The examples of expensive PFI projects that have cost the taxpayer dearly could fill a whole month's debate. I urge all members to read the submissions to the Finance Committee's inquiry into methods of funding capital projects. In that written and oral evidence, we read and heard lots of opinion. Many comments were made in defence

of PFI and against change, but it is important to look at where those comments came from. It is perfectly understandable that people with vested interests in the current system will oppose any change that will cap excessive profits and ensure best value for the public purse. However, as well as that opinion, the Finance Committee received lots of evidence that was based on fact. The evidence speaks for itself. A damning indictment of PFI is the fact that it will leave an £800 million noose around the neck of Scotland's public finances.

The Government has shown that we can move swiftly on infrastructure investment, which is so vital to the success of the economy and to the delivery of services. Since the Scottish National Party came into office, the Government has approved a raft of projects, many of which—including the Forth crossing—had suffered because of years of dithering on the part of the previous Administration. We will take no lessons on finance from the parties that presided over the scandalous PFI disaster that we have witnessed in recent years. Scotland's Government is determined and committed to achieving the best value for Scottish taxpayers, and that is exactly what it is delivering.

15:51

Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab): I have declared interests that are relevant to this debate.

As someone who has consistently spoken out against PFI/PPP, I am genuinely disappointed that the Scottish futures trust is not an end to that regime. Unison makes the point well in its submission, which highlights that the SFT is "essentially window dressing", as it keeps the "same profiteering and inflexibility inherent in PFI."

Alex Neil is right that infrastructure investment is a vital issue for Scotland's economy, public services and people. The issue is in essence whether the public get their new schools and hospitals and how those are paid for, managed and maintained. Sadly, I think that debates such as this may not catch the public's attention until such time as new schools and hospitals are cancelled.

I strongly recommend that Government back benchers—in particular those who claim to be trade unionists—read and digest every word of "Taking forward the Scottish Futures Trust". For very good reasons, the proposals are not supported by the trade unions.

As previous speakers have mentioned, John Swinney has already confirmed that the SFT will have several

"key components to its work. First, it will have at its core the non-profit-distributing model of finance."

He went on to confess that

"The NPD models are part of the family of public-private partnerships".—[*Official Report, Finance Committee*, 27 May 2008; c 560, 578.]

However, even the term "non-profit distributing" is a misnomer. As Dave Watson of Unison stated in his evidence:

"Of course, NPD is not non-profit, because the profit is simply taken at contractor level."—[*Official Report, Finance Committee*, 13 May 2008; c 506.]

The problem for the Government and its back benchers is that, before last year's election, the SNP made a very clear promise to the Scottish electorate that it would end PFI/PPP and restore commonsense public financing. That was one of the SNP's most popular policies—as evidenced by a BBC poll—and I do not doubt that it helped the SNP to electoral success. The Government must now be honest by admitting to those voters that they have been deceived. The SFT is not a clear end to PFI/PPP, as it is part of the PPP family.

Given the impact of the Government's decisions on infrastructure investment, the people of Scotland should be able to expect that their elected representatives are properly informed about the Government's proposals. However, the Government's intention was announced not to Parliament but at a conference. In making such announcements outside the Parliament, the SNP seems to be running the Government via conference so let us look at that conference in a bit more detail.

The list of organisations that were invited to the conference tells the story—as does the fact that the trade unions were not included. The purpose of the conference, which was hosted by the Scottish Government, is explained in the leaflet:

"The Scottish Government welcomes the involvement of the private sector in infrastructure investment. It recognises the benefit of partnership between the public and private sectors, the value of private sector know-how and the due diligence it provides through having private capital at risk, as well as the additionality their investment brings on top of public sector investment."

The conference was supported by Partnerships UK, which boasts of

"delivering investment through public-private partnership".

The conference's sponsors were Citibank, McGrigors and PricewaterhouseCoopers. The final clue as to the Government's purpose comes from the company that managed the conference, City & Financial, which states on its website:

"Governments around the world are embracing Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) as the delivery mechanism of choice for their infrastructure investment programmes."

We are clearly talking about PPP.

On another important privatisation issue, I wonder whether the Government back benchers noticed the surreptitious, throw-away mentions of “hub”, both today and in last week’s statement. They must know that that means opening up primary care to the market through PFI—if they did not know, I draw their attention to that. Hub is a joint venture model that allows primary care services to be broken up into saleable commodities under a process that is known in the privatisation world as unbundling, thereby providing commercial providers with entry points and market opportunities. As Pauline Bryan pointed out in the 2005 publication “The Red Paper on Scotland”, the more private finance involvement there is in the health service, the more likely it is that health services will fall within the ambit of international trade law, which will open up our health service to commercial invasion. We need to hear more about that from the cabinet secretary in his summing up.

The second key element of the SFT is that it will share expertise. How can the SFT provide impartial advice as well as being a funding provider and delivery vehicle? Will its advice be free? It will be a private body, so how will staffing work and to whom will staff be responsible?

On the final key element of SFT, even if local authorities are minded to pool projects, what guarantee does the Government have that the private sector will engage? The private sector hates multi-headed clients and thinks that they are a recipe for delay and additional costs, which are passed back via the contract.

If the Government cannot deliver its promise to end PFI it should be honest and say so. However, there are alternatives to the PPP family—I do not have time to go into them all. If a superhospital can be delivered through conventional funding, other projects can be delivered in that way. We could pursue fiscal powers for the Parliament—I argue for that in “The Red Paper on Scotland”. I have no time to describe Unison’s sensible five-point plan, but members can read about it.

In the business case for the SFT, the SNP’s stated intention is not to get rid of PFI. Not only is the SFT part of the PPP family but the Government’s intention is to continue with some currently proposed PPP projects and it is not ruling out traditional PFI, whatever the profit levels. The SNP grasped an easy PFI solution, as a drowning man grasps a lifebelt. Public utilities should be publicly owned and run and the SNP should deliver what it promised to Scottish people.

15:57

David McLetchie (Edinburgh Pentlands)

(Con): How many angels can dance on the head of a pin has been a question for theological debate since medieval times. The question has become a metaphor for pointless hair-splitting, so there can be no better description of the linguistic contortions to which the SNP will go when it discusses its proposed Scottish futures trust. As I said last week, the finest of fine points of distinction are presented as matters of fundamental difference and there seems to be a remarkable unwillingness to acknowledge that the SFT is a private sector vehicle whose purpose is to lever in private finance to public infrastructure projects. As such, the SFT shares many of the characteristics of PPP schemes and their PFI forerunners.

Why do the First Minister and the cabinet secretary have to perform such verbal gymnastics? They must do so because they have built their careers—and a manifesto—on denouncing PPP and all its works and accordingly are desperate to present their wizard wheeze as somehow fundamentally different. But it is not different, and everyone knows that it is not different, as was well illustrated by Iain Gray and, from a different perspective, by Elaine Smith.

An SNP article of faith about the SFT is that somehow borrowing will necessarily be cheaper than it would be under PPP. However, in its submission to Mr Swinney’s consultation, the SNP-run City of Edinburgh Council said:

“It is not entirely clear how funding would be cheaper than that possible under traditional PFI procurement methods given (i) the SFT’s private sector status (and resultant inability to borrow at the lower rates available to the public sector), (ii) the proposed use of margins around commercial lending rates to meet operating costs and (iii) the suggestion that it might be set up on the premise that surpluses would be invested in subsequent projects in the first instance rather than passed back to participating public sector bodies in the form of lower charges.”

I am afraid that the cabinet secretary’s statement last week took us no further forward in answering those questions from a council that is run by his party.

Instead, the SNP now seems to be clinging to a variant of PPP, the so-called non-profit-distributing model. That is because the SNP apparently dislikes uncapped equity profits or, as we heard today from Mr Swinney, Mr Neil and Mr FitzPatrick, excessive profits. Of course, they do not mind accepting donations from the beneficiaries of uncapped equity profits—wealthy men who would no doubt be appalled to learn that the SNP Government believes in putting caps or ceilings on the profitability of Scottish companies.

The so-called non-profit-distributing model is not a non-profit-making model—quite the reverse. It is,

in fact, a model in which the profits are guaranteed because they are built into the financing costs up front, as Elaine Smith eloquently demonstrated. Accordingly, for the SNP to claim that its futures trust will revolutionise the funding of public infrastructure projects is simply nonsense.

Conservative members have no objection to municipal bond issues, if that is what people want, or even aggregated municipal bond issues, which might turn out to offer a beneficial method of funding certain projects. Equally, I am in no doubt that PPP or PFI has in the past been the right funding model for many of the schools and hospitals that it has financed and which are now up and running throughout Scotland.

I have reminded members in previous debates about the escalating costs of the building in which we stand. At the same time that it was under construction, we delivered a major new royal infirmary for Edinburgh on time and on budget across the city at Little France. That PFI project, which started under the Conservatives, represented a far better deal for the taxpayer than this Parliament and produced a hospital fit for purpose to meet the needs of patients in the city. What I object to in the SNP proposals is not just the tortuous semantics but the unfounded assumption that its model is somehow inherently superior to others. Projects should be looked at on an individual basis.

Dithering over the Scottish futures trust is certainly hampering progress on important projects in this city. The SNP-Lib Dem council tells us that it has set aside £33 million for phase 3 of a new and upgraded schools programme, but that is only 20 per cent of the estimated cost. No one knows where the rest is coming from. The whole process of evaluation and authorisation has stalled and, as a result, children and young people in the city will have to wait longer for investment in their schools, if it comes at all. It has led to a situation in which a cabinet minister, Kenny MacAskill, has indulged in an unseemly public spat on the subject with the Liberal Democrat education spokesman on the council, which their two parties are supposed to be running in coalition. That speaks volumes about underlying tensions and uncertainties.

The motion that the SNP Government lodged for debate today is remarkable for its docile nature. It does not even ask Parliament to endorse the Scottish futures trust. Is that a failure of nerve or could it be the final dawn of reality? As the French put it so well, *plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*—the more things change, the more they stay the same. In a nutshell, that sums up the Scottish futures trust.

16:03

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): A slightly more robust amendment from the Conservative party highlighting some of the failures of the Scottish futures trust might well have gained the support of Mr McLetchie as well as the Liberal Democrats.

The Government has identified the need for investment in Scotland, yet it is very nervous about how it will satisfy that need other than by asking us to take note of 14 options for the way forward.

The transformation of the education estate has started, as Iain Gray said, and the pace has gathered. When Audit Scotland came to the Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee, it raised genuine concerns that that pace is now slowing. Despite what SNP members have stated, not one new school scheme has been commissioned and put in train since the new Government took office. It lauds the fact that it is delivering schemes that we started, yet not one new scheme has been commissioned.

It is at this point that one normally expects an intervention from a Government minister to highlight the inaccuracy of that statement. However, that has not happened. Not one new scheme has been commissioned.

Only this week, the council in the Borders, which I represent, completed its estates review for the next generation of schools and called on the Government to clarify the way in which the Scottish futures trust will support new build. In my constituency, a new high school and three new primary schools are being built. The council has no information on whether there will be support for future school building, but I guarantee that SNP minister after SNP minister will be tripping over themselves to come down to my constituency and open those new schools.

Last year, the SNP was perfectly clear. On 27 June, the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning told the Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee:

"We think that schools and pupils will obtain far better value from a futures-trust funded school than from a PPP-funded school."

That is clear. She went on to say:

"We will have a school building fund to which local authorities can request access."

She also said:

"We can still use the schools fund. However, the futures trust will provide a very attractive option for local authorities and I think that many are waiting with great anticipation to use it."—[*Official Report, Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee*, 27 June 2007; c 40.]

I say to the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth that we are still waiting, as are councils throughout Scotland. There is no longer a schools fund, nor is there a school building fund to which local authorities can request access. Again, if that is incorrect, I would be delighted to give way to the cabinet secretary, if that is not too dramatic for him.

Margo MacDonald: Will the member give way to me instead? [*Laughter.*]

Jeremy Purvis: I will. The cabinet secretary would be a poor substitute for Margo MacDonald. I am sure that she will make a more cogent point.

Margo MacDonald: Will Jeremy Purvis explain why both the Government and the previous Executive are hung up on a scheme that neither of them really likes. Why do they not just fund things from the Public Works Loan Board?

Jeremy Purvis: The reality, as Margo MacDonald knows, is that it would be possible to construct only a fraction of the schools that are being constructed in the Borders if they were funded from the capital budget for a few years. We need to use private finance and we need a proper relationship with private finance in order to do that. The point of this afternoon's debate is that it is disingenuous to deny that there should be a relationship with private finance, as the SNP has done all along.

When the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth came to the Finance Committee last week, he did so having lauded the Falkirk and Aberdeen schemes—the non-profit-distributing alternatives. I asked him:

"Both you and the Deputy First Minister have cited the Falkirk schools scheme as an alternative to PPP. Is that the case?"

He said, "Yes." I said that, on 21 May, I received a written answer from the Minister for Schools and Skills, which stated:

"Scottish Government revenue support for the Falkirk schools project will average £5 million per year for the 30 year duration of the PPP contract."—[*Official Report, Written Answers*, 21 May 2008; S3W-12863.]

John Swinney said:

"The issue comes down to terminology ... PPP is a generic family term for all such approaches."—[*Official Report, Finance Committee*, 27 May 2008; c 578.]

The next day, he came to the Parliament with a statement. We have a handy tool on our office computers—the find and replace function. The cabinet secretary had gone through his statement, found all references to PPP and replaced them with PFI. We have not heard the cabinet secretary mention PPP since his appearance at the Finance Committee.

Margo MacDonald asks why the matter is important. It is important because councils and the public sector throughout Scotland need clarity about where the Government support will be. On revenue support, only the Falkirk and Aberdeen schemes are able to benefit, because they have revenue support from the Scottish Government. They both have the equivalent of £5 million a year over 30 years. On 28 May, I asked the cabinet secretary whether that revenue support was available for other schemes. He 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.]

So that is a yes. However, page 22 of the Government's infrastructure investment plan states:

"specific grants have been rolled up and transferred into the local government settlement. Included in the rolling up are the PPP Revenue Support Grant and the Schools Fund Capital Grant."

John Swinney: You should finish your quotations.

Jeremy Purvis: The cabinet secretary heckles me now, but he did not take up the opportunity to intervene before.

When the cabinet secretary sums up the debate, will he provide clarity to councils? Will revenue support grants be available for NPD schemes in the future—yes or no?

16:09

Christopher Harvie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): This has been a fascinating debate, as much as anything else for the variety of views expressed by members of the former Administration, ranging from the far left to the apologetic neo-right.

The debate has reminded me of a person whom no one in the chamber—not even a political anorak like myself—will ever have heard of: the right hon Percy John Pybus. He nationalised London transport in 1932. He was a Conservative, taking over a bill piloted by Herbert Morrison under the Labour Government of the previous year, and he used funds made available to him by the Bank of England, which had in effect been nationalised by Andrew Bonar Law in 1917.

We are in a period of change in the economic politics of this country that is similar to what hit in 1929 to 1931. We are facing the period of peak oil and—much more dramatic—the complete collapse of the housing retail driver, which has produced apparent affluence in the past few years.

A nice quotation turned up when I was looking through *The Guardian* archives this morning:

"When Gordon Brown looks back on his career and broods darkly on why he never became prime minister"—

this was written in 2001—

"London Underground may be carved on his heart."

That was the underground that Gordon privatised and handed over to Metronet. What became of Metronet? Ask the bankruptcy commissioners.

That shows that, before us, there is a tidal shift in economics. Anyone trying to raise social product capital over the past 10 years has been faced by the runaway housing inflation in this country. In Germany, the price of housing has roughly flat-lined; here, a house purchased in a London suburb for £50,000 in 1986 is now worth £500,000. That gain has competed with the need to provide social product capital for our infrastructure, notably for our transportation system.

Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): Rather than trawl through history, I will make the point that in my constituency three new schools were opened in the previous parliamentary session. In my constituency now, we are waiting for three new academies—in Laurencekirk, Alford and Kemnay. They have been waiting for a year for £120 million input from the Scottish futures trust. How many more years will we have to wait until we can get some new schools in my constituency?

Christopher Harvie: Does the member remember reading in the past fortnight a report in *The Guardian*—a paper largely committed to the liberal cause—on the low quality of schools delivered by PPP?

Let us look further at the situation and contrast it with the continent, where private capital can be used under terms directed by the Government. In the French road building programme, for example, the roads are completed according to a schedule and then passed back to the state in a regular system, and the notions of profit are determined by the state. I think that one would find that the French road and rail systems are infinitely superior to our own.

Mike Rumbles: What about our kids?

Christopher Harvie: The problem is that our kids will have to pay the social costs involved in the housing retail driver that has dominated this country until now. Furthermore, our economic models have essentially been derived from the services sector. As a former military officer, Mr Rumbles will understand the cost-plus notion, in which the plus comes from the contractors. They are the people who have given us the great Chinook—£500 million spent on helicopters that have never flown. They are the people who have given us a situation in Scotland in which what

remains of our heavy industry is run by BAE Systems—not a company to be trusted with much.

I want finally to make one point about an area of infrastructure that we have not examined to any depth: maritime communications. That is up for grabs at the moment with the likely cessation of the Rosyth to Zeebrugge ferry. We can go in for infrastructure investment in this area by using the long-distance trans-European transport networks programme, which could produce, with the input of the Scottish Government, the sort of collaboration that would provide not only a service from Zeebrugge to Rosyth but, as Napier University has been exploring, the notion of communications right up the eastern coast to Orkney, Scandinavia, Iceland and beyond. That would be a transport system worthy of the arc of opportunity. That is the sort of thing that would cost us £1 billion over 30 years—a fortieth of what Gordon Brown has blown on Northern Rock.

16:15

James Kelly (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to take part in the debate. As other members have said, it is an important debate because infrastructure is key to growing the Scottish economy. It has been agreed across the Parliament that that is an important policy priority.

It is important that we get the infrastructure in place. We must have a proper roads network that provides connectivity and an adequate schools estate, which is fit for purpose for our young people to learn in. The question is how we fund such infrastructure projects. There are clearly limitations to the funds that are available from current funding pots, even though the Scottish budget has doubled to £30 billion since the start of devolution.

Consider the position of the schools estate at the start of devolution: 40 per cent of schools were not fit for purpose. The Executive had to consider how it would raise finance. The option of PPP was one that was very much supported, because it could be used to raise the £5.3 billion that has been required to improve the school estate over the past eight years.

In recent weeks, I have visited a number of schools in my constituency, some of which were funded by PPP. Contrary to what Christopher Harvie said, those schools have been well received by pupils, teachers and parents. They will provide an excellent platform to enable the children to learn and, I hope, go on to make a major contribution to the Scottish economy.

If the SNP had its way, those pupils would still be housed in the old school buildings. In the run-in to the last election, the SNP opposed PPP tooth

and nail. In its manifesto, which on this policy issue was basically a drive to say anything to get a vote, it developed the Scottish futures trust. As Elaine Smith said, the SNP told the Scottish people that it would provide funds at low costs of interest and that there would be limited profits. We see the realities of power now that "Taking forward the Scottish Futures Trust" has been published. The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth acknowledged to the Finance Committee last week that the model to be used is the NPD model, which is essentially a variant of PPP. As other members have said, it will still involve profits because the profits will be built in at the start. That is clearly at odds with what the SNP told the electorate and possibly some of its own members before the last election.

There are holes in the proposals in the document. Private sector finance is clearly an important policy area to explore in order to fund infrastructure projects, particularly when we consider that a six-month delay in a £100 million project costs £3 million. However, page 39 of the document admits that details of how private finance will be raised are still to be explored. Alex Neil talked about an intellectual vacuum; that is not just an intellectual vacuum but a gaping hole in the policy.

Much was made in the press release launching the policy of the £150 million-worth of savings that would be generated. Of course, the issue is covered in the document but, as its terms were drafted by PricewaterhouseCoopers, there is, as we might expect, a lot of consultant-speak about "value-for-money drivers" but very little information about how those savings will be derived. If no work has been done on how private finance will be raised, how can it be said that the policy will generate £150 million of savings?

It will be a long time before the first school is delivered under the Scottish futures trust. It is no wonder that SNP members have been squirming as the debate has progressed. If the SNP's answer to investment in Scotland's infrastructure is the Scottish futures trust, it is time to send it the message that it cannot be trusted with Scotland's future.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): Mr Brown, you have five minutes.

16:21

Keith Brown (Ochil) (SNP): Just as Charlie Gordon, quite reasonably, cited his experience in Glasgow City Council as his reason for supporting Andy Kerr's amendment, I will draw on my experience in Ochil and in Clackmannanshire Council in highlighting my reasons for supporting John Swinney's motion.

In Ochil, there are five PPP state secondary schools projects across three local authorities; one is complete and the other four are at various stages of construction. That might, on the face of it, appear to be a good legacy of the Labour-Lib Dem-Tory PFI scheme—*Holyrood* magazine this week described PPP as PFI's illegitimate son, although the phrase used was rather fruitier than that. However, when we start to look in some detail at Labour's PFI adventure, it seems more like an oppressive hangover than a golden legacy. I am glad that Michael Matheson is not in the chamber to hear this, but it was the SNP-run Clackmannanshire Council in 2002—not Falkirk Council—that was the first to have a trust model approved by the former Scottish Executive. Indeed, it was approved in a phone call to our chief executive from, of all people, Nicol Stephen. However, when Labour took control of the council in 2003, it immediately changed the trust model back to a PFI model.

That is when it all went wrong for Clackmannanshire, the smallest mainland council in Scotland. The bill for its three PPP-built secondary schools will be in excess of a quarter of a billion pounds over the period of the project—and that is for a population of around 48,000. What that means, apart from the fact that the council is now mortgaged to the hilt, is that there is no prospect of any substantial investment in its primary schools, which are decaying and are, to absolutely no one's surprise, subject to a review that is widely expected to result in closure proposals.

Incredibly, these three massively expensive new secondary schools have no swimming pools. Despite local objections and petitions by pupils and Alloa swimming club, which is one of the most successful clubs in the UK, the Labour council would not support the incorporation of pools into the entire PPP secondary school estate and into any of the schools being built in Clackmannanshire.

Andy Kerr: Will the member give way?

Keith Brown: I am sorry; I have only five minutes.

The local council said that developers do not like swimming pools because of the space that they take up and the on-going maintenance costs. That bears out my experience of PPP as being developer-driven. Developers do not like to refurbish schools; instead, they say that they prefer to start from scratch. However, that means that the policy becomes environmentally unsustainable, because buildings that are, in many respects, worthy of refurbishment simply get torn down.

Moreover, developers do not like refurbishments as they often preclude the sweetheart deals that

they manage to strike over land for developments that have nothing to do with the school and are often built at the expense of playing facilities and green space for children.

I have known councils to change the location of proposed schools because the developer wanted it that way. In our scheme, for example, we had to take out the children's whiteboards at the developer's request and cover the cost of demolishing one of the schools because the developer refused to fund it at the previous price.

The SFT model outlined by the cabinet secretary will have the virtue of putting those who use—and those who pay for—our new schools back in charge of where they are located and what facilities they have.

Why did the local Labour Party exchange the trust model that the SNP had won for the present PFI scheme? The debate on the subject that took place in the council chambers when the decision was taken was fascinating. It is worth recalling that not one Labour councillor was prepared to advance a single argument for the merits of PPP; indeed, most of them said that they did not like or want it. The only argument for accepting it was the cliché that we have had to listen to for a number of years—it is the only game in town. That was the reality as those Labour councillors saw it. The picture that Andy Kerr painted, whereby there was a kind of schools supermarket in which, on arrival at the checkout, a council would be asked whether it would like to pay for its new schools through traditional borrowing, through the use of a trust or by putting them on a PPP gold credit card, is not an accurate representation.

The argument that PPP is the only game in town—that there is no alternative—is one of intellectual poverty. It means that the merits of any given proposal are not considered. PPP is a Thatcherite policy with a Thatcherite slogan: "There is no alternative." Everyone knows that, under Labour, PPP was the only game in town when it came to our schools. That is why the Scottish Government is right to consider as many options as possible for getting the best value for taxpayers' pounds.

I hope that the SFT will result in the process being far more open and transparent. At the meeting to decide on the preferred bidder in Clackmannanshire—from which the public and the press were excluded—I recall that we were handed one sheet of A4 paper, which was taken from us as we left. It is to the cabinet secretary's credit that he has listened not to the siren voices of the developers and consultants who have ridden on the gravy train of PPP, but to the parents, pupils and taxpayers of Scotland. That is why I will support the motion.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Peter Peacock, you have five minutes.

16:26

Peter Peacock (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):

Without doubt, one of the biggest challenges that the public sector has faced in recent decades has been to find the right level of infrastructure investment. From the 1970s until the late 1990s, in particular, there was massive underinvestment in public infrastructure and in the maintenance of the assets that we had. For most of that period, I was either the chair of the finance committee of a big regional council or a council leader. Over those years, I watched the condition of the infrastructure for which I was responsible decline. There were more than 200 schools in the area, many of which were built in the 1860s and the 1960s. Those that were built in the 1960s often had higher maintenance requirements. Over the whole estate, we had less than £4 million a year to spend on rebuilding and refurbishment. The rate of decline of the stock was far greater than the rate at which we could invest to recover that decline.

A vast injection of new capital into infrastructure was needed. That is why I am pleased that when we were in government we made significant advances on that front, although they were never sufficient. I am afraid that the Scottish futures trust offers no answer to how we can maintain the current rates of investment, let alone to how we can gear up investment.

As a finance convener and as a council leader, I spent a great deal of my time trying to get round public sector accounting rules. I had a fair degree of success in that on the revenue front, but progress on the capital side was virtually impossible because of the old section 94 consents, which had to be applied rigidly. Thankfully, we did away with section 94 consents when we were in government and introduced the prudential code, which offered much more flexibility but still represented a prudent approach to dealing with finance.

As a finance convener, I considered issuing bonds on more than one occasion. We had the power to issue bonds, as did every local authority at that time, but we did not use it throughout the 17 years for which I was responsible for such matters, and nor did any other local authority. I acted not out of principle, but simply because the use of bonds offered no advantage whatsoever. It did not do so then and it does not now. Not a single extra penny would be released for investment. All that would happen is that borrowing in the current prudential regime would be displaced. In any event, bonds are not a cheaper form of finance per se, so why would one want to replace Public Works Loan Board

funding—which Alex Neil mentioned—or other open market borrowing with bonds? One would not. Moreover, a bonds system is more difficult to administer. Bonds are a key part of the SFT model, but they will not add anything.

I turn to the magical wheeze whereby local authorities will join together to issue a municipal bond, not for their own area, their own spending requirements and their own statutory responsibilities, but for another area and for statutory responsibilities for which they are not responsible. I seriously doubt whether the powers exist that would allow a council to be the principal funder of a project in another area that would produce no direct benefit for that council's area.

Leaving that aside, why would a local authority do that anyway? Why would it raise money for roads or schools or old folks homes outside its area or responsibility when it could not raise enough money for such provision within its area? That would involve it in saying no to its own constituents' infrastructure needs, but saying yes to the infrastructure needs of other people. That simply will not wash. Such a system will not come to pass because it is the antithesis of what local government is about—looking after local interests before the interests of other areas.

As members have said, page 7 of the SFT document that was issued a couple of weeks ago confirms that NPDs are PPPs. I know an NPD when I see one, because I approved the first one. I went to Argyll and Bute to announce it and I cut the sod for one of the first schools that was built under that arrangement. I can tell members that it is no cheaper for the public purse than is any other form of PPP.

Alex Neil: Will the member give way?

Peter Peacock: I say with respect that I will not, because the time for my speech has been cut.

NPDs are PPPs, but I doubt whether the SNP's plan for the NPD model will get off the ground, because no grant support is available for it, as Jeremy Purvis said. Not a single extra penny is on offer above what the previous Administration provided. Under our PPP schemes, councils had to find part of the finance, but they received substantial grant support to continue with building programmes. Even under the old section 94 consents, huge Government finance was given to loan fund support as, otherwise, projects would not have happened. Both those approaches acknowledge that, to get any local capital spending going, central Government support is needed. When council tax levels are frozen, if it is necessary to cut services to raise far more cash than was required for previous PPP projects in order to fund additional borrowing, that will not happen. To pretend that it will is a delusion.

The Scottish futures trust has become the nae futures trust. At every turn, the policy is flawed and unworkable. The latest iteration is in the document that was published two weeks ago, which contains pages of consultancy gobbledegook that masquerades as a capital investment strategy. The policy will fall apart and the SNP will take responsibility for it when it does.

16:31

Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): The debate has been excellent and many good points have been made. The cabinet secretary would do well to listen to people such as Peter Peacock, from whom we have just heard, and Keith Brown, who has a different perspective. They have experience of local government and Peter Peacock also has considerable experience of national Government.

This afternoon's debate is best likened to the Cheshire cat in Alice in Wonderland—we think that we have it fixed, but it fades away to nothing before our wondering eye. The SNP's Scottish futures trust is like a Cheshire cat, but this time it is from Alex in Wonderland—it has no existence and is not what it purports to be. The SFT is certainly not what the SNP proposed originally in its manifesto.

Like others, I do not deride any efforts to identify new methods of support for capital infrastructure projects—for schools, hospitals, roads, railways and of course bridges. We still have a legacy from the Conservative years of a lack of investment, short termism and a lack of interest in public assets. I detected understandable embarrassment from the Conservative group as it supported the SNP's policy. Some of that legacy was put right under our watch, when Liberal Democrats were in government. We built new schools and refurbished hundreds with leaky roofs and clapped-out buildings. We built new hospitals and opened the first new railway lines since Beeching. SNP ministers are still living on that legacy as they preside over school openings and railway-line developments that the Liberal Democrat and Labour partnership facilitated and financed when in government.

I say to Joe FitzPatrick that SNP ministers will be opening Liberal Democrat-Labour schools until the completion of PPP 2 in 2012, when 383 schools will have been completed, 224 of which will be under PPP or a member of its family. I would have thought that SNP ministers would be significantly embarrassed to open PPP schools, given their castigation of it. Some of those projects were financed under a non-profit-distributing model that, as we have heard, Liberal Democrat-led Argyll and Bute Council developed. John Swinney has lauded that model as the way forward and has acknowledged that it is part of the PPP family.

Alex Neil: Will the member give way?

Robert Brown: I will give way in a moment.

I did not understand why Keith Brown said that, although an alternative had been available to Clackmannanshire Council, for whatever reason, the decision changed when the administration changed. Options that the previous Government's ministers had approved were available to that council, as has been said.

It is perhaps appropriate that I have wondered whether Alex Neil would lay into the SNP Government on the ground that this son of PPP is "morally criminal".

Alex Neil: Not at all. Will the member confirm that, according to its evidence to the Finance Committee, the Liberal Argyll and Bute Council decided to go down the NPD road after examining the costs of PFI and concluding that, despite what Labour members have said, NPD was a less expensive model?

Robert Brown: Alex Neil makes a reasonable point, as far as it goes—different options are appropriate in different situations. However, we should recognise that, at the time to which he refers, the market was immature and that there has been a process of development from PFI, through PPP, to the non-profit-making model.

The SNP's plans for a futures trust have been variously described as "a joke", "muddled", "unworkable" and "flawed", to name only the kinder comments. John Swinney spoke of projects being accelerated and enhanced by SFT. However, in the understatement of the year, Michael Watson of McGrigors said:

"there is a bit of a hiatus at the moment in the delivery of projects".—[*Official Report, Finance Committee*, 29 April 2008; c 405.]

There bloody well is.

Members: Oh no.

Robert Brown: Excuse my language, Presiding Officer—there is a real hiatus in the delivery of projects. It goes back to the lack of grant support for projects to which a number of members, especially Jeremy Purvis, referred. That is the key reason that projects are not being taken forward. We need John Swinney to provide somewhat clearer answers than he did in his previous statement on the issue.

Today's motion is possibly the most incomprehensible that has yet come before the Parliament. As David McLetchie pointed out, it does not dare to put the long-awaited Scottish futures trust proposals to Parliament for approval—it is left to the Conservative amendment to do that. The minister's statement and today's debate had to be dragged out of the Government like a dentist drawing teeth.

Derek Brownlee: Will the member give way?

Robert Brown: I must make some progress.

The infrastructure investment is aspirational only and bears little, if any, relationship to reality. The Government's document is a scoping paper, at best, and sets out no less than 14 options, all of which require further work.

That brings me to the subject of the new Forth bridge, which is at the core of the Liberal Democrat amendment. It is not some insignificant local project, but £4 billion of investment. Can the cabinet secretary do today what the First Minister would not when questioned by Nicol Stephen last week and give the nation's Parliament some information on how the Government intends to find that £4 billion? In particular, what method of funding will it use, and what will be the timetable for the project? There are two possible answers to that question. The first is that the Government knows the answers fine well and is again treating Parliament with discourtesy and disrespect. The second and most likely answer is that it does not have the faintest glimmering of an idea and that, like Mr Micawber, it is hoping that something will turn up. We are entitled to some answers from the cabinet secretary.

There is another issue. The SNP's problems on capital funding exist because it has no ideological bearings and no core beliefs beyond independence. It is telling the world that, contrary to its rhetoric, it believes in the private sector; David McLetchie demonstrated that clearly.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Brown, you must finish now.

Robert Brown: In conclusion, the issue that we are debating is one of the most important of the session. Evasion and avoidance—spin and mood music—will not do. This is Scotland's Parliament, and it deserves and requires sober, hard facts. How many schools will be built, by which method, when and how? How will the Government fund the new Forth crossing? It is time for answers.

16:38

Gavin Brown (Lothians) (Con): It is important for me to respond to points that have been made by SNP back benchers about what they call the scandalous PFI disaster. They picked out a handful of examples of the scheme not working successfully but completely ignored the fact that it has delivered on time and on budget hundreds of school, hospital and transport projects that are producing excellent results the length and breadth of Scotland and the UK. It is worth nothing that the Canmore Partnership presented the Finance Committee with the results of a KPMG survey that stated clearly that 85 per cent of operational PFI

projects delivered good or very good performance. It is important that I point out at the start how successful PFI and PPP have been. The model is not perfect by any stretch of the imagination, but the vast majority of projects have been extremely successful.

Keith Brown: Does the member disagree with his Westminster counterpart Edward Leigh, who said that PFI represents

“the unacceptable face of capitalism”?

Gavin Brown: Mr Leigh and I will agree on some things and disagree on others. Once again, Keith Brown has picked out one specific example. I do not think that Edward Leigh was referring to PFI as a whole; I think that he was referring to one or two examples where it had not been successful. In response to Keith Brown’s point about Ochil and Clackmannanshire, I agree that, in certain circumstances, PFI and PPP are not the right way forward and NPD may well be the best option. However, in many other cases—particularly for larger and riskier projects—PPP and PFI have an excellent track record.

The other myth that was put forward by the Government—which it has tried to peddle a number of times—is the idea that there will be cheaper borrowing through the Scottish futures trust. Simply saying that we can get cheaper borrowing through the Scottish futures trust does not make it true, no matter how many times that is repeated. At no point has the Government taken the time or trouble to explain how it might get cheaper borrowing through the Scottish futures trust. Indeed, it produced the consultation at the same time as it started work on the strategic business case. Would it not have made more sense to produce a strategic business case and then ask the interested parties and stakeholders to comment on what is a more thorough piece of work, even though it is still full of gaps? Almost all the 89 respondents to the consultation asked how the Government was going to secure cheaper borrowing because they could not see how it would do that. Those respondents were not just developers and private companies; they included councils and public authorities. For example, Mr McLetchie mentioned the response from the City of Edinburgh Council, which is run by the SNP and the Lib Dems.

We will evaluate any proposal that is put to the Parliament on its merits. We think that there should be a spread of available funding options and that the best option for any specific project should be chosen, whether it is PFI, PPP, NPD, conventional funding or municipal bond issues. Whichever option is most appropriate for a project is the one that should be pursued.

Margo MacDonald: Will the member take an intervention?

Gavin Brown: Not at this time.

I note, in passing, that the SNP manifesto appeared to concur with that sentiment in stating clearly that

“it will be open to local authorities and other public bodies to choose between PFI/PPP and Scottish Futures Bonds for planned and future projects.”

It is, therefore, disappointing to hear the evocative rhetoric from some SNP back benchers who rule out the use of PFI and PPP, as the cabinet secretary appeared to do in his evidence to the Finance Committee.

It is important that, as Mr Brownlee’s amendment asks, we get whole-life cost data for all the projects that we have undertaken and the ones that we are going to undertake, so that we can make an accurate and fair comparison between PPP, NPD and conventional funding in order to make the right decision, grounded in reality, each time. We are pretty sure that PPP has benefits in bringing together design, construction and service delivery, and it certainly brings long-term operational efficiency. We challenge the Government to pull those data together, so that we can compare each funding method on a fair, like-for-like basis.

Margo MacDonald: Will the member give way?

Gavin Brown: Not at this time. I am afraid that I am not going to take any more interventions.

I apologise to the SNP back benchers, but it has to be said that the proposed NPD model involves profit. Calling it non-profit is a complete misnomer; there is capped profit rather than no profit. In many cases, the capped profit can end up being about the same as it would have been under PFI or PPP; the only difference is that it is front loaded.

The watchword—or watchphrase—must be best value overall for the taxpayer in the whole-life cost of the asset as well as its fitness for purpose. We think that the Government needs to step up the pace on the Scottish futures trust. We are a year on and there has been a perceived hiatus in activity—especially in education if not so much in other areas—which brings with it the danger of a loss of skills. The Government has taken something of a Rolf Harris approach to the SFT so far. It has sketched about for a little while and then dropped the pencil, and every couple of months the cabinet secretary, John Swinney, has shouted out, “Can you tell what it is yet?” We need a lot more clarity, a bit more realism and a bit less hostility towards the private sector.

16:44

Andy Kerr (East Kilbride) (Lab): I will start by addressing Christopher Harvie's speech. I do not share his views or agree with his definitions, but I welcome the SNP to the "apologetic neo-right"—to use the definition that Mr Harvie used. That is exactly where they are. It was embarrassing to watch Alex Neil's face during the debate. I almost felt sorry for him as it dawned on him that he has been sold down the river by his leadership on this matter.

For years, I have listened to SNP members quote three main sources: Allyson Pollock, at the University of Edinburgh; the Cuthberts; and Unison. During those years, what they said was gospel. Let us consider how the gospel now reads.

Allyson Pollock says:

"A new name can't save a poor policy".

Of the model that the SNP is proposing, she says:

"it is not so much an alternative as a PFI hybrid."

Given Allyson Pollock's criticism of the Government's model, Mr Neil should hang his head in shame.

Mark Hellowell—who is also of the University of Edinburgh and whose research was also widely used by the SNP against PFI/PPP—says of the NPD model:

"Evidence suggests that this form of public-private partnership does not lead to lower levels of profit-making than PFI."

I welcome Mr Neil to the world of the profit-making private sector by the route of the SNP's policy.

On the Argyll and Bute scheme—which I was happy to sign off when I was in government because I wanted models of PFI to develop in the public sector and in the private sector—Mark Hellowell says that the

"'internal rate of return' was more than 15 per cent—which is about the norm for the mainstream PFI market".

It was Mark Hellowell who said that—not Labour members, as Alex Neil implied.

What do the Cuthberts say?

"There is a danger that the Futures Trust will be hailed as a great success even if all it achieves are marginal improvements over PFI."

And what does Unison say about the model?

"What is being proposed is mainly window-dressing, and looks nothing like what the SNP promised in their Scottish Futures Trust policy document."

All the people whose views the SNP used against the previous Government as evidence against its model of public provision for infrastructure projects are damningly critical of the

model that has now been developed—"PFI-lite", as Matt Smith said.

Perhaps, during the recess, when Mr Neil and his colleagues take a break and take time to reflect on matters, Mr Neil could visit the arc of prosperity countries—nations that the SNP continually point to as examples of how business should be done and among which are some oil-rich nations. Mr Neil could go to the conference on PPP in the arc of prosperity nations that will be held on 28 and 29 October 2008. At that conference, Sweden will talk about using PPP to meet its infrastructure needs and there will be an address on road financing in Norway, a country that is rich in oil but which uses PPP as a means of delivering its public infrastructure programmes. Alternatively, he might like to go to the talks entitled "PPP and the Danish State", "Danish Archives PPP Project", "PPP in Norway, Possibilities and Conceptual Issues" and "E18 Grimstad to Kirstiansand Project". All those discussions concern PPP projects that are being delivered by sane, rational Governments in the interests of their communities.

We heard a lot—from Keith Brown, in particular—about PFI/PPP being the only game in town. Utter tosh. One need only go to the Scottish Parliament information centre or read the evidence that was presented by the previous Government about the balance of infrastructure investment that was made available to the public sector to see that that is not the case. The traditional funds that were invested in the development of capital projects rose to more than five times their initial level over the time when we were in power.

South Lanarkshire Council, which covers my area, has rebuilt all its school estate so that children can learn and teachers can teach in an appropriate environment. The secondary schools were delivered by PPP, and the primary schools were delivered by traditional public finance. PFI/PPP is not the only game in town—quite the opposite.

Margo MacDonald: Will the member give way?

Andy Kerr: I would like to continue to deal with some of the key speakers.

Mr Brownlee said that there are a number of themes in his amendment. In recent times, there has only been one theme for him—to support the SNP Government.

Derek Brownlee: Will the member give way?

Andy Kerr: I will take an intervention about what Mr Brownlee finds he cannot support in the Labour motion.

Derek Brownlee: I understand Mr Kerr's anger at the fact that the Conservative party has put forward a reasonable proposal on capital

investment that he seems to have been unable to produce for himself, but the fact is that we simply do not accept some of the assertions in the Labour amendment. However, unusually, given that it is a Labour amendment, we agree with quite a lot of it. I know that Mr Kerr is a keen runner; if he had walked up the stairs to speak to me, he might have got an agreement.

Andy Kerr: Oh. So the political approach of the Tory party is that it is not about the politics; it is about whether I walk up the stairs. Is that the Tory party's political analysis? Is that how the Tory party in Scotland will be taken forward—if someone does not speak to them, they go in a huff? That is pathetic, Mr Brownlee.

I will move on to the Scottish futures trust. Someone mentioned roads, and of course the dualling of the A9 to Inverness was raised at First Minister's questions. Not much was said about the original Scottish futures trust document, "The Scottish Futures Trust: A better deal with Scottish Futures Bonds", which the SNP issued in 2006. It says that using bond issuance will make investments available for truly Scottish decisions, and that we will get

"a new Forth bridge; the dualling of the A9 to Inverness; improvements to the trunk route network ... and ... a bullet train connecting Glasgow, Edinburgh and Aberdeen."

That is complete fantasy, not just in terms of what the SNP can deliver, but with regard to the so-called Scottish futures trust.

Mr FitzPatrick and Mr Neil reminded me of Statler and Waldorf in "The Muppet Show": they sat there grimacing as they realised that they have been sold out. I will consider some of the key points that Alex Neil made. He talked about Norway—I remind him that an oil-rich nation such as Norway is using PPP. He talked about value for money—I remind him about the Argyll and Bute model, in which the rate of return for the private sector is equal to, if not more than, the rate of return in traditional PPPs.

Alex Neil: Not true.

Andy Kerr: How is it not true? The very research that he has quoted year in, year out in the chamber and beyond is now simply "not true"? Is he having a sudden dawning realisation—at last—that the University of Edinburgh's facts are "not true"?

Alex Neil: Will the member give way?

Andy Kerr: I will not take Mr Neil's intervention because I understand what he is trying to do. The evidence that he has used to attack PPP in the past was given to him by the University of Edinburgh—by Mark Hellowell and Allyson Pollock in particular—and he does not like it when they now discover that the SNP Government's plans

are no different from those of the previous Government.

Mr McLetchie's comment was very interesting. He reminded members about some of the technicalities, and of the fact that the NPD model is not a non-profit model whatsoever. He also talked about the "docile nature" of the motion—I have to say that that is matched only by the docile nature of Mr McLetchie's amendment.

I hope that the Parliament will support the motion in my name. SNP members have moved from shambles to shamelessness on the Government benches; from the fluffy world of opposition where they could say anything they liked to the real hard reality of government. They have realised that they have had to sell out their principles in favour of the new model of the Scottish futures trust. It is a pathetic sight: the so-called left wingers on the SNP back benches selling out their principles to support their Government and keep the private sector on board. We just had to look at their faces as they were sold down the river without a second thought from their leadership.

16:52

John Swinney: Robert Brown's credentials for chastising the Government for discourtesy to Parliament were somewhat weakened by the expletive that he came out with in his speech. It certainly brought a new frisson to the Liberal Democrat benches.

I will begin with Charlie Gordon's speech. Not for the first time in a debate on this subject, the points that he raised had significant worth. He advanced the central point—with which I do not disagree—that infrastructure is essential to the process of boosting economic growth. However, he went on to—essentially—criticise the Government for having no coherent approach to the infrastructure programme that we are bringing forward. I advise Mr Gordon to examine the Government's infrastructure investment plan, which is a very deliberate and genuine attempt to address the issue that he raises.

The Scottish public sector has historically not been particularly well connected or joined up, and the infrastructure investment plan, which captures £14 billion of investment over the next three years under the Government's programmes as part of a 10-year programme to invest £35 billion, is a genuine attempt to try to draw together those different projects and establish a method of working together more collaboratively. That lies at the heart of so many of the interventions that the Government is taking in relation to advancing its policy agenda.

I hope that Mr Gordon will take the time to examine the infrastructure investment plan, and that he will recognise the Government's attempt to try to bring all those projects together. The plan captures the volume of activity over which the Government is presiding in terms of infrastructure investment.

One of the central contentions of the debate has been that nothing is happening on infrastructure investment. I know that it is not warmly welcomed by all members, but I would have thought that Mr Gordon and some other Labour members—such as Mr McAveety, who I see is now in the chamber—might have given a warm welcome to the fact that the Government has taken the necessary steps to award and deploy the M74 contract. The First Minister initiated the construction phase of the project the other week.

I would also have thought that somebody might have applauded the fact that, since May 2007, the Government has approved seven schools projects that will result in 45 new schools. I accept that a number of those emerged from commitments that the previous Administration made, but I say clearly and directly to all the members who scaremongered their way across the parliamentary chamber all afternoon that this Government took the pragmatic decision to allow those projects to take their course and, therefore, the children of Scotland are getting those schools as a consequence of decisions that this Administration took.

Mike Rumbles: In the previous parliamentary session, the Government built three new schools in my constituency. We are now in the second year of this parliamentary session and are still waiting for Government approval to fund three academies. Aberdeenshire Council is ready and waiting—it has been waiting for a year now—so when will the Government fund those schools?

John Swinney: The previous Administration may have built plenty of schools, but it certainly never paid for them and the next generations of our citizens will pay for every one of them. Members can take a glance at the document that I have set out and see the escalating cost of the PFI contracts for which we have had to pay as a consequence of the previous Administration's decisions. The cost has spiralled from £500 million every year when we came into office to £800 million every year, but we get lectures about prudence from the crowd in the Labour Party. What an absurd proposition.

If Mr Rumbles wants to know about capital investment in our school estate, perhaps he would like to look at the local authority settlement, which delivers a 13 per cent increase in local authorities' capital budgets. How on earth does he expect

schools to be paid for if not by the investment in our local authorities' capital programme?

This Administration takes a different approach to capital investment: it works in partnership with our local authorities to deliver capital projects at local level in Scotland—that is the case not only in the school estate; we have made announcements that our predecessors dithered about for years, such as the decision to build the new Southern general hospital in Glasgow—and to do it as effectively and efficiently as we possibly can.

In his ludicrous amendment, Mr Kerr sets out the fact that he wants us

“to restart the building of schools, hospitals and the transport infrastructure.”

Has he never heard of the school building projects in Aberdeen, Falkirk, Dumfries and Galloway or Perth and Kinross; or of the Southern general in Glasgow, the M74 and the Airdrie to Bathgate rail link? What a preposterous pile of rubbish we have heard from the Labour Party today.

Mr McArthur offers us his generous amendment about the Forth replacement crossing and suggests that the Government has changed the timetable for setting out how it intends to proceed with the project. On 19 December 2007 and 15 January 2008, I said that those issues would be brought before the Parliament during 2008, and they will be. That is another promise that this SNP Government has kept.

As the infrastructure investment programme sets out, so far this parliamentary session, between us, the Government and the local authorities are putting £2 billion into the schools investment programme. We will come back to the Parliament with further proposals on investment in the school estate, but we will do it in an orderly fashion once we have considered the conclusions of the Audit Scotland report that said that we have to deliver a better school estate strategy than the previous Administration did.

When we came into office, we found not a school estate strategy or a programme for investing in our schools but an unfunded bill to pay for the last set of projects that were put forward by the previous Administration—for which we had to find the money.

We have had an illuminating debate today, in which all the Opposition parties have had to accept that the Government has an ambitious agenda for investing in the infrastructure of Scotland and a reliable means of bringing that investment together and aggregating it to deliver the greatest value for the people of Scotland. That is what this Government was elected to do, and that is what we are going to deliver.

Presiding Officer's Ruling

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): I undertook to give further consideration to the final point that Jeremy Purvis raised earlier this afternoon, on the role of officials in relation to the notification of announcements.

With regard to the particular case to which Mr Purvis referred, I understand that, in addition to writing to the convener of the Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee, the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning also answered an inspired parliamentary question on the issue at 9.10 this morning, thereby complying with the guidance.

I have asked parliamentary officials to liaise with Government officials on the issue of communication. I hope that the matter can be considered speedily and the outcome delivered as soon as possible. It is always a matter of good practice for the Government to give as much notice as possible to Parliament on the occasion of such announcements.

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. For clarity's sake, can you confirm that you are referring to written question S3W-13886, which was lodged yesterday? That could well be the inspired question to which you refer. When I checked on the Parliament's website at lunch time today, after I had received the cabinet secretary's letter, I found that the response was:

"Due for answer Wednesday, June 18, 2008".

If the question was answered at 10 past 9 this morning, one minute before the letter was sent to the clerk and the convener of the Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee, my point still stands. If the Government is to provide information to allow all members of the Parliament to scrutinise such major announcements, an answer that has not appeared on the Parliament's website and a letter that has been sent to only one member of a committee, without any consideration of how it is to be distributed to other members, are not sufficient for us properly to scrutinise such major decisions.

The Minister for Parliamentary Business (Bruce Crawford): Further to the point of order, Presiding Officer. I ask you to confirm for me, please, that paragraph 11 of "Good Practice Guidance by the Presiding Officer on Announcements by the Scottish Government", which you issued and which was agreed by all business managers, states:

"The Government may make an announcement by means of a response to a Parliamentary question lodged for written answer. This can be timed to be issued shortly before or to coincide with a media briefing."

That was agreed by the Parliamentary Bureau.

The Presiding Officer: The minister is correct, and so is Mr Purvis. There are issues here, and I repeat that I have therefore asked parliamentary officials to liaise with Government officials on the issue of communication. I think that there is an issue of communication here. I ask members to be patient until the matter has been looked into to see whether we can improve that communication.

Decision Time

17:03

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson):

There are eight questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that amendment S3M-2056.2, in the name of Margaret Curran, which seeks to amend motion S3M-2056, in the name of Nicola Sturgeon, on remote and rural health care, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marilyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

AGAINST

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Ahmad, Bashir (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)

Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 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)
 McGregor, 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)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 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)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 40, Against 79, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The second question is, that amendment S3M-2056.1, in the name of Mary Scanlon, which seeks to amend motion S3M-2056, in the name of Nicola Sturgeon, on remote and rural health care, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The third question is, that amendment S3M-2056.3, in the name of Ross Finnie, which seeks to amend motion S3M-2056, in the name of Nicola Sturgeon, on remote and rural health care, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The fourth question is, that motion S3M-2056, in the name of Nicola Sturgeon, on remote and rural health care, as amended, be agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Parliament commends the work of the Remote and Rural Steering Group and recognises that its report, *Delivering for Remote and Rural Healthcare*, forms the basis of a safe and sustainable service for remote and rural areas that will increase community resilience and guarantee the future of Scotland's rural general hospitals; notes the extension of the Emergency Medical Retrieval Service pilot, providing consultant-led resuscitation and transfer of patients with life-threatening injuries or illness in remote and rural hospitals in the west of Scotland, which commenced on 2 June 2008; further notes the work of the Remote and Rural Healthcare Education Alliance in providing a co-ordinated approach to the development of remote and rural health education programmes across Scotland to ensure that Scotland's healthcare professionals can provide, and their patients can benefit from, the best possible healthcare, as locally as possible; further notes the concerns raised regarding the provision of ambulance services and asks the Scottish Government to ensure that those living in rural communities are not disadvantaged; in line with recommendation 10.12 of the NHS Scotland Resource Allocation Committee's (NRAC) report, calls on the Scottish Government to establish without delay a standing committee to lead work on the future development of the NHS board funding formula and to come forward with details on the precise membership, format and remit of the committee, and further calls on the Scottish Government to review the impact of the NRAC report on NHS boards' ability to maintain and develop remote and rural services.

The Presiding Officer: The fifth question is, that amendment S3M-2057.3, in the name of Andy Kerr, which seeks to amend motion S3M-2057, in the name of John Swinney, on investment in Scottish infrastructure, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 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)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 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)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

AGAINST

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Ahmad, Bashir (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)

Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 54, Against 66, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The sixth question is, that amendment S3M-2057.1, in the name of Derek Brownlee, which seeks to amend motion S3M-2057, in the name of John Swinney, on investment in Scottish infrastructure, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Ahmad, Bashir (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

AGAINST

Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)

Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 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)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 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)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

ABSTENTIONS

MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 65, Against 54, Abstentions 1.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The seventh question is, that amendment S3M-2057.2, in the name of Liam McArthur, which seeks to amend motion S3M-2057, in the name of John Swinney, on investment in Scottish infrastructure, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 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)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 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)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

AGAINST

Ahmad, Bashir (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)

Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

ABSTENTIONS

MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 54, Against 64, Abstentions 1.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S3M-2057, in the name of John Swinney, on investment in Scottish infrastructure, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Ahmad, Bashir (Glasgow) (SNP)

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

AGAINST

Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)

Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 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)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 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)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 66, Against 54, Abstentions 0.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Parliament notes the publication of *Taking Forward the Scottish Futures Trust* and the £14 billion of infrastructure investment set out in the Scottish Government's Infrastructure Investment Plan; believes that it is important to ensure maximum value for the public purse from infrastructure investment and welcomes efforts to deliver better value, and further notes that 14 possible options for work to be carried out under the umbrella of the Scottish Futures Trust (SFT) were identified and will be the subject of further development before being brought back to the Parliament; believes that a broad range of public and private options should be available for capital investment by public bodies and that the public sector should seek appropriate provisions in the best interests of taxpayers;

calls on ministers to report to the Parliament on progress after the summer recess and regularly thereafter until the final range of options and shape of the SFT has been confirmed; calls on the Scottish Government to finalise the details of the SFT as soon as possible and, as part of its work on the SFT, to review how refinancing provisions in non-profit distributing models might be amended to ensure that they achieve intended aims without discouraging investment, and calls on the Scottish Government to develop and publish a robust investment option-appraisal framework capable of producing comparable information on whole-life costs for future projects regardless of which method of procurement or operation is used.

Education (Holocaust)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S3M-1960, in the name of Jackson Carlaw, on holocaust education in Scotland. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament accepts the crucial importance of ensuring that the genocide of the Jewish and other peoples and minority groups inflicted during the Holocaust is never allowed to slip from public consciousness; welcomes the commitment of successive Scottish governments to developing a permanent National Holocaust Museum based in East Renfrewshire and looks forward to the fulfilment of that commitment; applauds the work of the Holocaust Educational Trust, among other organisations, for the role it plays in educating young people from every background about the Holocaust and the important lessons that can still be learned from it today, and considers that sufficient resources should be made available to allow schools across the west of Scotland and beyond to provide ongoing Holocaust education, with visits to the Auschwitz concentration camp being considered as part of that educational mix.

17:10

Jackson Carlaw (West of Scotland) (Con): I was born and raised in East Renfrewshire. In the early 1930s, my grandparents had settled in the emerging community of Whitecraigs and Newton Mearns, which is where my parents set up home and where I grew up in the 1960s and 1970s. What became the family business developed on a site at Eglinton Toll in Glasgow, adjacent to the Gorbals area of the city. In that area, at the turn of the 20th century, Scotland's future Jewish community arrived—a tale splendidly told in Ralph Glasser's "Growing Up in the Gorbals" and his subsequent three sequels. As the community prospered, it migrated south to Pollokshields and Shawlands and then, in the 1960s and afterwards, to suburbs such as Giffnock and Newton Mearns.

My parents had many Jewish friends and neighbours so, naturally, several of my childhood friends were Jewish too. As I speak now, I remember many of them vividly and with the greatest affection. I understood the persecution of the Jews in biblical terms and in an historical context but, in all my recollection, not once did I hear discussed these events or the raw grief for deeds that had been committed just 20 years earlier. I have never quite fully understood why. Perhaps there was a driven need to put it all behind them and to get on with life. Perhaps, too, there was a feeling that families everywhere had suffered one way or another. Perhaps, in those more innocent days, it was felt to be just too awful a burden for any child to bear.

Not until my teens did I become more generally aware of the Holocaust that had been perpetrated by Nazi Germany. Jacob Bronowski's landmark television documentary, "The Ascent of Man", ITV's "The World at War", which for the first time screened the raw images, and the Labour peer Lord Janner's personal testimony in Parliament all played a part in encouraging me to investigate for myself the crimes against humanity about which the wider world had been made aware in detail only on 29 November 1945 and 19 February 1946, when the American and Russian prosecution teams respectively screened evidential documentaries at Nuremberg before the 21 Nazi defendants and international opinion.

Dr G M Gilbert, the American psychiatrist in attendance at the trial, summarised the truly shocking footage:

"The acres of corpses of Russian POWs murdered or left to starve, the torture instruments, mutilated bodies, guillotines and baskets full of heads; bodies hanging from lamp posts; the ruins of Lidice; raped and murdered women, children with heads bashed in; the crematoria and gas chambers; the piles of clothes, the bales of women's hair at Auschwitz".

In the years since, it seems to me, Auschwitz has in some ways almost been misrepresented as the only centre of atrocity. Overlooked, it seems, are the 1.5 million to 2 million Jews who were shot in the occupied Soviet Union and all those others who perished in concentration camps such as Sobibór, all evidence of which the Nazis ruthlessly eliminated in their retreat. Indeed, had that retreat not become a rout, all trace of Auschwitz would, in all probability, have been similarly concealed.

Even now the detail of an event can strike a chord. Just 20 years ago, and some 43 years after the event, an episode that had remained shrouded, a testimony untranslated, became public. As a parent with two young sons of my own, I was certainly stopped short when I learned about it. On 20 April 1945—a day with which, unwittingly, most members will be familiar—Hitler made his final public appearance, which is recorded in a photograph in which, outside his bunker for the last time, he is seen caressing the face of a very young German boy who had been press-ganged into the final defence of Berlin. Even as he did so, and as British forces reached the outskirts of Hamburg, events unfolded that were recorded by the German author Gitta Sereny in a documentary that has still not been seen by any English-speaking audience.

A column of trucks coming from Neuengamme concentration camp in Hamburg delivered their loads at the door of an empty school building in the north of the city: 26 men, two women and 22 children. The children, boys and girls of mixed nationalities but all Jews, between four and 12 years old, had been used for medical experiments

in Auschwitz. As Auschwitz was evacuated they had been transferred for the continuation and, if possible, completion of the experiments. However, time had run out. The SS knew that, alive, these children represented the most horrible evidence of their crimes. So, on that April afternoon, they took them into the large gymnasium of that Hamburg school, which had been equipped with looped ropes placed symmetrically 2m apart, and they hanged them. When they had finished with the children, they hanged the two French doctors and two Dutch nurses who had looked after them.

Children today are familiar with the events of the Holocaust. As my childhood friends' grandparents and parents who endured and survived depart this earth, we have resolved that the crime of mechanised murder and cruelty on an industrialised scale must never be forgotten. Nor should we be naïve—it happened before the second world war, in Armenia, and afterwards, in Stalin's empire, in Cambodia and in Bosnia. It is happening today in Darfur and it will happen somewhere else soon.

The objective of our generation must be to do all that we can to commemorate the Jews, the disabled, Gypsies, homosexuals and others who were murdered by Hitler's regime, and to educate people against anti-Semitism and prejudice in all its forms. I welcome the work of successive Governments here and at Westminster, particularly during the past decade under Labour and the Liberal Democrats, to realise that ambition. Such work is also our duty in a Parliament that has no Jewish members. A community that was 48,000 strong at the end of the war has declined to some 17,000 members.

This is awkward, and I hope to say what I have to say in a measured way. I will never question a member's faith and it would take extraordinary events before I questioned a member's humanity. Division should play no part in our conduct in the Parliament in respect of our unity in the face of the challenge that is presented by the legacy of the Holocaust. Therefore, more in sorrow than in anger I must say that I deeply resent the implication of one member and his Westminster colleague that I, my colleagues or any members are less concerned that the lessons of the Holocaust be remembered. A few weeks ago, in response to a written question from my colleague Murdo Fraser, which queried the Barnett consequential that arose from statements made at Westminster on the funding of trips to Auschwitz for school pupils in England, the Minister for Schools and Skills confirmed that the announcement

"did not generate additional funding for Scotland."—[*Official Report, Written Answers*, 16 May 2008; S3W-12776.]

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

Jackson Carlaw: Therefore, on 24 April the Parliament divided on a false premise. Lurid letters were sent and offensive suggestions about the character of members were made to the media and to the Jewish community in Scotland—

Ken Macintosh: Will the member give way?

Jackson Carlaw: To add insult to injury, the canard is being repeated at Westminster, where a misleading and inaccurate motion has been tabled. That is a poor show. There has been an abdication of taste and character—

Ken Macintosh: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I believe that it is not in order for the Parliament to be inadvertently or deliberately misled. For clarification, will you rule on this? The word "additional" was used carefully to imply that there were no Barnett consequential, and I ask the member to reflect on that. The minister—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That is a point of debate, not a point of order.

Jackson Carlaw: Notwithstanding what has happened, I am delighted to pay tribute to the work of the Holocaust Educational Trust and the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust and to confirm that education authorities throughout the West of Scotland region that I represent have confirmed to me in writing that they have no plans to downgrade the quality or breadth of their education of young people about the Holocaust, and that they will continue visits by school pupils to Auschwitz, when they consider that appropriate. In particular, the East Renfrewshire community is keen to be the operational base for the proposed national Holocaust museum. I would be grateful if the minister updated us on the proposal's status.

No political party has moral superiority on the matter. This is not a competition. What purpose would be served by a competition? Members of the Parliament have a collective duty to play our part in a wider, sustained national effort to commemorate victims and survivors of the Holocaust and to ensure that lessons—clear and undiminished—are passed down to future generations. Whatever party games are played, I think that all members acknowledge that shared responsibility. If we are united in that resolve, we will not fail.

17:18

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): I congratulate Jackson Carlaw on securing the debate and on packing so much detail into so short a time.

The Holocaust, or Shoah, was undoubtedly one of the foulest crimes ever committed in human history—the mass murder of 6 million men, women and children solely because they were Jewish or part-Jewish. Jews were murdered not only in the most bestial ways but on an industrial scale and by industrial means. Half of the Holocaust's victims died in wholesale massacres, starved or were beaten to death; the others were murdered in facilities that had been built specifically for that purpose.

Four extermination centres were established in occupied Poland: at Chelmno, Belzec, Sobibór and Treblinka. From 8 December 1941 to October 1943, when Sobibór was closed after an heroic revolt by prisoners, an estimated 1.7 million to 2 million Jews were killed, the vast majority by gassing.

The system that the Nazis perfected took prisoners directly from the trains that transported them—usually in cattle trucks—and, under the guise of sending them to shower and be disinfected, packed them into gas chambers to be asphyxiated by carbon monoxide or Zyklon B gas in excruciating pain lasting 15 to 30 minutes. The bodies of the victims were burned or buried. No work was gleaned from the victims; the Nazis, fixated on slaughter, were interested only in destruction. In total, only 106 prisoners of the death camps, who had been forced to work on the sorting of possessions and the disposal of corpses, are known to have survived the war.

The names of those extermination centres are not widely known. The one that is known was the largest and most notorious of all—Auschwitz-Birkenau. It was originally built to house Polish political prisoners, 70,000 of whom were to die there, and to destroy through labour Soviet prisoners of war, of whom 10,000 perished. Auschwitz became a huge slave labour camp and extermination centre. About 23,000 Roma and Sinti, and at least a million Jewish people, died there. The overwhelming majority, including the old, infirm and children, were selected for destruction immediately on arrival. The rest were killed more slowly by beating, hanging, shooting and further selections or in gruesome medical experiments carried out by Nazi doctors. The terror of people who died so horribly or survived each day in squalor, enduring back-breaking toil while knowing that their loved ones had been destroyed, cannot be comprehended.

A few thousand prisoners survived the hell of Auschwitz following liberation on 27 January 1945, the date that has become Holocaust memorial day. Their testimonies have told us much of what we know today. I visited Auschwitz in February this year. It was a moving and overwhelming experience. The scale of the Birkenau site, where

up to 140,000 prisoners were barracked, 774 to a block and in full view of the crematoria, is astonishing. Stalin once callously remarked that a million deaths is a statistic, but one death is a tragedy. At Auschwitz, that is brought home directly. The histories, photographs and testimonies of individual victims tell of the suffering and torment that each and every person who was incarcerated there—murdered or survived—went through and show the enormity of the Nazi crimes and the catastrophe that engulfed the Jewish people.

Auschwitz, the other death camps and concentration camps and the persecution of the Jewish people, recent and historical, cannot be forgotten if they are never to be repeated. We must recall the unwillingness of many nations, including the western democracies, to permit substantial Jewish immigration from Nazi-threatened and occupied Europe, even during the war. Scottish schools have opportunities to study the Holocaust and visit Auschwitz if local authorities and schools deem that to be appropriate. That can be done not least as part of the new emphasis on the rights and responsibilities of individuals and nations, through the forthcoming religious and moral education outcomes, which will foster the development of values, beliefs and attitudes, and through the social studies outcomes, which include the study of history.

There has never been a specific fund in Scotland for visits to Auschwitz. The Scottish Government works with the Holocaust Educational Trust to ensure that children are educated on the Holocaust. The Government will provide £25,500 to Renfrewshire Council to host next year's Holocaust memorial day, on the anniversary of the Auschwitz liberation, and it has offered to provide £750,000—half the required funding—for a Holocaust museum in East Renfrewshire, should it progress.

Scotland has never had anti-Semitic laws. We are a tolerant society and I hope that future generations will learn from our tolerance, which we intend to inculcate in them.

17:22

Cathy Jamieson (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to make a short speech and I thank Jackson Carlaw for lodging the motion.

Several years ago, I led a delegation of young people on a visit to Poland. Many of them were interested in the history of the Holocaust and wished to see locations where some of the atrocities took place. At that time, our Polish hosts were less than keen to take us and we respected

that, but that had an effect on me and I vowed that, at some point, I would return to look at the sites. I had the opportunity to do so earlier this year, during the Easter recess.

As Kenny Gibson will know, nothing can prepare you for the sights in Auschwitz. When you come off the bus or train, the buildings look normal and are at the end of a town. There is beautiful workmanship in the red brick buildings—they are not the ramshackle huts that we might expect. The sign above the entrance says “Work makes you free.” Believe it or not, there are art deco touches on the tiles and in other areas, which is absolutely at odds with the horror of what went on there. The beautiful copperplate script of the meticulous records that were kept of the individuals who went through the place hides the horror that the pages describe.

As you move round, you see display cases full of spectacles, clothes, shoes and suitcases, all taken from inmates. Then you see the living conditions—the straw on the floor in areas where people slept and the bunks that are three high. You see the gas chambers themselves and, perhaps most shocking of all, a wall of human hair that was taken from people who died there, to be used to make textiles. You have to pinch yourself to remember that, just as the Parliament celebrated yesterday the 60th anniversary of the national health service, it is not much longer than 60 years ago that those horrors took place.

We must remember that, as Kenny Gibson and Jackson Carlaw pointed out, others were persecuted in addition to the Jews—the Poles, the Czechs, the Hungarians and the Russians. Each has their own memorial in Auschwitz that descendants of families from those nations and others can visit. Also persecuted were the Roma—not just the original Gypsies or Travelling people, but many who were well-to-do families. Many had their children taken from them, and subsequently those children were taken from the usually Catholic children’s homes that they were in to the camps, despite the best efforts of the churches to save them. It is poignant when we realise that, only a few weeks ago, we heard reports of Roma being persecuted in another European country.

When I was at Auschwitz, I saw children, young people and families of all nationalities. Many of the young people had what I would describe as the typical teenage swagger on their way into the memorials, but they were quieter as they went round. Many were in tears and angry by the time they came out, and all of them were changed for ever as a result of what they had seen.

Believe it or not, I am not all that interested in where the money comes from, where it goes or how it gets there. However, if there is one thing that we can do, surely it is not too much to ask that

we ensure that Scottish young people have the opportunity to go and see what happened and to be thankful that it was not their parents—although in some instances, of course, it will have been their relatives—and country-folk who suffered. I make a plea to the Government to consider how our schools can be supported to send our young people to Auschwitz and how we can give them the education to ensure that we both remember and acknowledge the record on human rights of all those who stood against the atrocities. We must ensure that such atrocities never happen again.

17:27

Stuart McMillan (West of Scotland) (SNP): I welcome the debate and congratulate Jackson Carlaw on securing it.

I am sure that there is a consensus that education about the Holocaust should ensure that future generations in Scotland understand the tragedy that took place and understand how cruel and callous the human race can be.

I will not go into all the details of Jackson Carlaw’s motion, and I am afraid that I will not go into Ken Macintosh’s amendment, which I thought was rather unfortunate, but I particularly agree with the final part of the motion, which begins:

“and considers that sufficient resources”.

Like other MSPs, I have been to Auschwitz. I was there in 2000 as part of an InterRail trip to eastern Europe. I will come back to that in a moment. Auschwitz is approximately an hour from Kraków, which is a major city and the cultural capital of Poland. There were three camps at Auschwitz. In June 1940, the Auschwitz concentration camp was established, when the Nazis took it over; in October 1941, Birkenau was established; and in 1942, the Monowitz concentration camp, which was a munitions factory, was established.

Thankfully, in 1947, the new Polish Government decided to create the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum. Everyone who has been to Auschwitz will recognise that that was an important decision and an important landmark in teaching people about the history of that location. Auschwitz receives about 500,000 visitors every year and it is free to enter, which is vital, because it ensures that more people have the opportunity to see for themselves the atrocities that happened.

As I mentioned a moment ago, I have been to Auschwitz and also the Birkenau camp. The strangest thing for me was walking through the gates under the sign “Arbeit macht frei”. The first accent that I heard was a German accent. It did not freak me out, but I was a wee bit taken aback, then within half a second I was delighted it was a

German accent. Some German kids were there to learn about the atrocities that happened.

We have already heard this evening about the atrocities, and I will not repeat what has been said, but I am sure that members who have visited Auschwitz-Birkenau will agree with what I am about to say. The first thing that people notice when they walk about the two camps is the silence, and the second thing that they notice is the terrible atmosphere. Cathy Jamieson mentioned people who swagger as they go in and are in tears when they are there—I fully agree with that observation.

The worst part of the visit for me was the gas chamber—going into it and seeing how people died in such a cruel and callous way. I do not think that anyone could forgive the Nazis for what they did there.

I encourage people to go to Auschwitz, Dachau or any of the other camps that still exist. It is important that not only this generation but future generations learn about what happened in the past and about how cruel and callous the human race can be when people have total control over others. Everyone in Europe should go there. I welcome the money that the United Kingdom provided earlier this year. I also welcome the fact that the Scottish Government is working with the Holocaust Educational Trust to make progress.

17:31

Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): Members' business debates are usually non-contentious affairs, and I had hoped that today would be similarly consensual. However, after hearing Mr Carlaw's ungracious and typically belligerent remarks, I feel that that might be unlikely.

Like others, I was given the unforgettable opportunity to visit Auschwitz-Birkenau. I have had the even more moving experience of hearing first hand of the Nazi death camps from several survivors, some of whom are now my neighbours and friends, living in East Renfrewshire, in modern Scotland. To this day, I never fail to be struck by the generosity and humanity of those survivors—not the bitterness that one might expect from those who have experienced the most inhumane of ordeals.

I do not claim to have a monopoly of compassion or even of appreciation of the importance of ensuring that future generations learn about the Holocaust. However, I find it somewhat ironic to be in this situation. It is a bittersweet moment to speak in a members' business debate on the subject six weeks after Parliament voted down £150,000 to pay for senior pupils across Scotland to visit Auschwitz.

I have been to every Holocaust day national event in Scotland, and I can say unequivocally that I was impressed most by the one that was organised and held by the young people of Fife in January 2007. Those who were there will remember the torchlight procession through the middle of Kirkcaldy, the Anne Frank festival and the sculpture, but most of all they will remember, like me, that it was organised entirely by pupils. Not just the memorial day but three weeks of events were organised by pupils from three Fife high schools because they had visited Auschwitz and taken it upon themselves to share that experience with others.

Like the motion, I do not claim that visits to Auschwitz are the only way to learn about the Holocaust. As such, I have long been a supporter of former First Minister Jack McConnell's idea of establishing a permanent Holocaust education centre or museum in Scotland.

I have also been a supporter of making Holocaust teaching packs available to every school in Scotland. I ask the minister why those packs are not being updated. Does she not want to record the testimony of other Scottish survivors so that pupils can appreciate how immediate the lessons of the Holocaust are for us in Scotland? I do not find acceptable the answer to my parliamentary questions that

"There are no plans to update the Holocaust teaching packs".—[*Official Report, Written Answers*, 8 February 2008; S3W-9612.]

The minister should make some plans. Holocaust education material should be on the web and on compact disk, and it should be refreshed and updated.

Most of all, although it is not the only way to learn the lessons of the Holocaust, I cannot believe that the Administration, supported by the Conservative party and the Greens, voted down funding to support senior pupils across Scotland visiting Auschwitz. I still do not understand why members of the Tory party voted in that way. To be fair, both Liz Smith and Murdo Fraser were sympathetic in their contributions to that debate, but instead of realising the error of their ways and doing something about it, we find the Tories' Mr Carlaw lodging a motion that commits to nothing. Chutzpah is a Jewish word that has gained common usage in English. It means cheek, gall, a brass neck or brazen manner, and that is exactly what we have seen from Mr Carlaw today.

It is not enough to have a debate on a members' business motion at the end of the day, when there will be no vote and when no commitment from the Government is called for. We need action and funding. The Scottish Government has been given the funding; we have the Barnett consequential and we should use them. We should not hide

behind the word “additional”. The Minister for Europe, External Affairs and Culture made it clear in her summing-up speech in the debate on 24 April that we have had Barnett consequentials and that we have new Barnett consequentials.

Disappointed as I was by the vote six weeks ago, and although there is a certain *schadenfreude* in seeing Mr Carlaw’s political discomfort, I have two constructive suggestions for the minister, to which I hope that she will reply positively.

First, I would like the minister to look again at finding the money to support the visits; it is not a huge sum of money and it could make a big impact. At the very least, will she agree to meet representatives of the Holocaust Educational Trust when they visit the Parliament in two weeks’ time?

Secondly, will the minister revisit her answer to my question on updating holocaust teaching packs? She would do Scotland a service if she were to commission further work not only to update the teaching packs, but to record the testimony of survivors living in our communities today, who could open our eyes to the cruelty of which civilized people are capable.

17:36

Elizabeth Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife)

(Con): One of the most moving presentations that I heard during my former career as a teacher was about Auschwitz. It was deeply moving not only because of the vivid and sensitive description of what the pupils had seen on their visit, but because of its profound effect, which became clear when they assessed what the trip meant to them as human beings. It was a life-changing experience, so there is no doubt in my mind that educating youngsters about the Holocaust is not only an important lesson in history but one that is extremely valuable when it comes to understanding the many human conflicts that affect our world today, especially those that are so complex in relation to inequality and racism. As Karen Pollock, chief executive of the Holocaust Educational Trust, said:

“The Holocaust Educational Trust’s Lessons from Auschwitz Course is such a vital part of our work exactly because it gives students the chance to understand more the dangers and potential effects of prejudice and racism today.”

I understand why visits to the locations are a far better learning experience than anything that could happen in a classroom, especially when they include hearing real-life accounts from the survivors of the Holocaust. I have been more than persuaded of the need to allow as many pupils as possible from throughout my constituency area to take part in those visits, although I am also clear that how teachers and pupils engage in Holocaust

education should be a matter for the individual school to decide. In that respect, I caution the Government against becoming overprescriptive.

With regard to Mr Macintosh’s comments, it is unfortunate that a political judgment is being made in this debate—it should not be about politics. There are some unnecessary debates about Barnett consequentials and whether they exist; it is a great pity that the tone of the debate has been clouded by that.

Jackson Carlaw’s motion makes clear our support for the commitment of successive Governments to developing a national Holocaust museum based in East Renfrewshire. Like the outstanding work that is undertaken by the Holocaust Educational Trust, such a museum could help to ensure a permanent reminder to us all of the horrors of that period in history and, more important, a permanent reminder of the need for reconciliation in future generations. Together with the priceless value of Holocaust education in the school curriculum, that is why such projects are so important for this country’s heritage and why the motion, so eloquently moved by Jackson Carlaw, is important both in its praise for what has already been achieved and in relation to what can, I hope, be achieved in the future.

17:39

Christopher Harvie (Mid Scotland and Fife)

(SNP): In 1960s Germany a friend of mine, who was Scots, was asked by a girl about Hitler and whether she had heard of him. Until after 1968 there was a certain amnesia in Germany about the period after 1871, which was when German history stopped in the schools in many of the Länder. Finding out about what had happened between 1933 and 1945 tended to be, to an extent, a re-exploration of the place, given American serials and the effects of 1968. Members might remember the famous French right-wing attack on Daniel Cohn-Bendit—“He is only a German Jew”—to which the Paris students in the streets replied, “Nous sommes tous juifs allemands,” or, “We are all German Jews”. Of course, Mr Cohn-Bendit is now a leading European politician in Strasbourg.

My own university and area of Tübingen in south Germany did not have a creditable career. A fount of lawyers and medical men, the university was rabidly anti-semitic. Moreover, it was one of the places where a degree of mass nazification occurred.

About 12 miles from Tübingen, there is a place called Grafeneck. Some members who have been to Auschwitz might well have come across the name, because, in 1940, 11,000 of the so-called unfit were gassed there. At that point, the

operation stopped. However, even though it is exceptionally beautiful, one still senses a terrible chill about the place.

I imagine that, had I been in Tübingen at that time, I would have said, "Ich bin Hase und ich weiß gar nichts daran," or, "I am only a rabbit and know nothing about what is going on." Of course, that was a survival mechanism against a regime of what George Orwell called

"gangsters and shiny bottomed bureaucrats",

who would simply whack the head off anyone who opposed them. One has to realise the gangsterish nature of the regime and, indeed, what it did to Germany's own culture. After all, these people produced Mendelssohn, Gustav Mahler, Heinrich Heine, Karl Marx, Freud, Einstein, the painter Liebermann, film directors such as Billy Wilder and novelists such as Joseph Roth—one of the greatest writers of the 20th century who, appalled by the onset of nationalism and aware of what was going to come, drank himself to death in Paris in 1939.

At times such as this, I think of people such as David Daiches, probably our greatest literary scholar and the son of the rabbi of Edinburgh, and my old friend Bill Fishman, who fought against Oswald Mosley in Cable Street and was delighted to end the war as a sergeant in the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders—indeed, he was one of the original Whitechapel highlanders. They had to cope with knowing that 6 million of their people had died, and did so with remarkable tolerance. Of course, people such as Martin Buber reinforced ideas of religion in the war's dreadful aftermath.

Again, at such times, I also think of Wordsworth's poem "The Old Cumberland Beggar", in which he pleads for tolerance of even the least humanised part of society and makes it clear that we are all judged by our treatment of the man who slouches from village to village and is unable even to look up at the stars. That is what young Germans nowadays feel about the situation, partly through their acquaintance with the past, and is what we must all consider now and in future.

17:43

John Park (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I congratulate Jackson Carlaw on securing this debate and welcome the many comments that have been made on the importance of Holocaust education.

I have never been to Auschwitz; however, in 1985, while at primary school, I visited the Anne Frank house and museum in Amsterdam. Living in today's modern society, one really cannot imagine how that family, under such a threat, could hide in

those cramped conditions. Indeed, I cannot quantify the visit's impact on me and my school friends. The house's history, the significance of the events that took place there and the story of the family all left a long, deep mark on that group of youngsters and changed for good our outlook on a number of matters. The experience certainly helped me to form opinions about many aspects of the wider world and taught me the importance of understanding and tolerance. When I visited the house again two or three years ago, I was amazed at how the exhibition has been developed. It sends out a powerful message and I encourage as many people as possible to visit it.

Of course, that is not possible for everyone, which is why I was pleased by the launch last month of the Anne Frank Trust's first permanent educational programme for Scotland. Using a series of travelling exhibitions and educational workshops, the project aims to challenge prejudice and reduce hatred, and to encourage young people of all backgrounds and communities to embrace positive attitudes, responsibility and respect for others.

Ken Macintosh mentioned the Anne Frank and you festival that ran in Fife last year, but he did not say that it attracted more than 8,000 people—a significant number, especially given that it was held in the cold month of January—to the various events, which included exhibitions, plays and education seminars that captured the imagination of young Fifers and their families.

The new project will specifically address racism, prejudice towards newly arrived communities and the sectarianism that continues to be a problem in parts of Scotland. It aims to reach an audience of at least 15,000 young people every year. I particularly welcome the proposed activity on sectarianism and newly arrived communities because, if we are completely honest, those are still major issues across communities in Scotland.

Just as the Scottish Parliament provides an opportunity—which Westminster does not—for people to see at first hand how a Parliament works while promoting citizenship and democracy, I believe that the launch in Scotland of the Anne Frank educational programme will provide an opportunity for schoolchildren not just to learn about the horror of the Holocaust, but to gain an appreciation of the importance of understanding, tolerance and the need to reduce hatred in a modern, outward-looking Scotland. I am sure that no member would disagree that such an approach is desirable.

17:46

The Minister for Schools and Skills (Maureen Watt): I offer apologies on behalf of Stewart

Maxwell, who stayed for Jackson Carlaw's speech but was not able to stay longer.

I congratulate Jackson Carlaw on securing the debate and on his powerful and thought-provoking speech. A debate on Holocaust education in Scotland provides an opportunity for the Parliament to reflect on the horrors of that period in history and to consider our role in ensuring that, through education, it never happens again.

As Jackson Carlaw said, our Jewish communities have lived here for many years—they were one of Scotland's first immigrant communities. Their contribution to our national life has been significant; they are, indeed, one of the threads in the tartan of Scottish society.

Scotland's commitment to recognise all people as equals was demonstrated as long ago as 1320, when it was woven into the declaration of Arbroath, which said that, regardless of race or religion,

"There is neither weighing nor distinction of Jew and Greek, Scotsman or Englishman".

The Scottish Government recognises the distinctive character and history of our Jewish community. We understand the paramount importance for all the people of Scotland of commemorating the Holocaust.

Of course it is important to remember the atrocities that Europe's Jewish communities experienced during the terrible period that we now refer to as the Holocaust but, as several members have mentioned, other communities also suffered, and it is important that that, too, is remembered. Disabled people, Gypsies and members of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender communities lost their lives in large numbers, and our Holocaust memorial day commemorations in Scotland have always remembered them, too.

We also remember other holocausts and genocides of more recent times, such as those in Bosnia and Rwanda. Disturbingly, even the unbelievable horror of the Holocaust was not enough to stop people again trying to eliminate an entire community or ethnic group. There can be no stronger message about why we must remember and why we must educate young people on the need to ensure that such events never happen again.

The visits to Auschwitz-Birkenau that are organised by the Holocaust Educational Trust, to which I have been speaking, are one of a number of excellent opportunities that are provided for young people to learn about the Holocaust. I would like to make it clear that this Government has certainly not refused funding for such school visits. On the contrary, we have provided record funding and freed up local authority budgets for

education. As Jackson Carlaw and others have said, the United Kingdom announcement did not generate additional funding for Scotland at the time; the Treasury has confirmed that. Furthermore, the previous Scottish Administration did not provide schools with any funding for visits to Auschwitz-Birkenau. I agree with Liz Smith that schools should be able to make their own judgments on the matter.

Ken Macintosh: In a previous debate, the minister's colleague suggested that we received a Barnett consequential of £152,000 a year. Is the minister saying that, since the recent announcement, we no longer receive a Barnett consequential for Holocaust education trips?

Maureen Watt: We did not receive a Barnett consequential for the Holocaust Educational Trust.

Learning about the Holocaust can and does take place on other school visits and in other contexts, such as on visits to the Jewish Museum in Berlin to examine racist behaviour and to the Anne Frank house in Amsterdam, which John Park mentioned, to learn about forced migration. It is schools' prerogative to decide the best way for their pupils to learn about the Holocaust. Many more children and young people visit concentration camps through other means that schools promote. Together with the Holocaust Educational Trust visits, those visits are valuable. As most members have said, such visits are life changing.

In addition to supporting Holocaust memorial day every year since 2001 and making a commitment to support a national commemoration day in January 2009, the Scottish Government has provided school resources for Holocaust education and has funded the production of "Testimony"—an exhibition about the Holocaust that provides a powerful and emotive experience and which includes personal testimonies of Scotland's survivors. "Testimony" can be used in schools or in other locations such as community centres and libraries to raise awareness about the Holocaust's reality.

The Scottish Government was happy to confirm the previous Administration's commitment to support a permanent Holocaust museum, to which the motion refers. I understand that the Jewish community has reconsidered that proposal and that it intends to suggest an alternative option. We will obviously wish to consider any new proposal carefully.

Our work on commemorating the Holocaust is part of our wider work to tackle racism, religious intolerance and all forms of discrimination, as John Park said. The story of the Holocaust provides the most powerful example of the terrible things that can happen when racism and religious intolerance are taken to extremes. However, every day in

Scotland, people experience abuse, discrimination and disadvantage because of their faith, skin colour or ethnic background. Racism, religious intolerance, homophobia and all other forms of discrimination damage individuals, communities and Scotland as a whole. We know the importance of ensuring that our young people understand those issues and we will do all that we can to create a fairer Scotland for them to inherit.

Meeting closed at 17:53.

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