

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Wednesday 29 October 2008

Session 3

£5.00

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Produced and published in Scotland on behalf of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body by RR
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SCOTTISH MINISTERS AND LAW OFFICERS

Office of the First Minister

FIRST MINISTER—Right hon Alex Salmond MSP

MINISTER FOR EUROPE, EXTERNAL AFFAIRS AND CULTURE—Linda Fabiani MSP

MINISTER FOR PARLIAMENTARY BUSINESS—Bruce Crawford MSP

Health and Wellbeing

DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER AND CABINET SECRETARY—Nicola Sturgeon MSP

MINISTER FOR PUBLIC HEALTH—Shona Robison MSP

MINISTER FOR COMMUNITIES AND SPORT—Stewart Maxwell MSP

Finance and Sustainable Growth

CABINET SECRETARY—John Swinney MSP

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MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT, INFRASTRUCTURE AND CLIMATE CHANGE—Stewart Stevenson MSP

Education and Lifelong Learning

CABINET SECRETARY—Fiona Hyslop MSP

MINISTER FOR SCHOOLS AND SKILLS—Maureen Watt MSP

MINISTER FOR CHILDREN AND EARLY YEARS—Adam Ingram MSP

Justice

CABINET SECRETARY—Kenny MacAskill MSP

MINISTER FOR COMMUNITY SAFETY—Fergus Ewing MSP

Rural Affairs and the Environment

CABINET SECRETARY—Richard Lochhead MSP

MINISTER FOR ENVIRONMENT—Michael Russell MSP

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LORD ADVOCATE—Right hon Elish Angiolini QC

SOLICITOR GENERAL FOR SCOTLAND—Frank Mulholland QC

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PRESIDING OFFICER—Alex Fergusson MSP

DEPUTY PRESIDING OFFICERS—Alasdair Morgan MSP, Trish Godman MSP

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29 October 2008

Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 29 October 2008

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

Time for Reflection

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): Good afternoon and welcome back. As always, the first item of business is time for reflection. Our time for reflection leader today is the Rev Iain MacDonald from Westray and Papa Westray in Orkney.

The Rev Iain MacDonald (Westray and Papa Westray, Orkney): For over 15 years, I have enjoyed living and working on one of Orkney's northernmost isles. Westray is a community that is built on trust. Doors are left unlocked and car keys remain in the ignition. You leave your bike somewhere and it is there for you the next morning. People look after each other, particularly in times of adversity—for example, during illness, bereavement or family crisis. They rally round and shore each other up in all sorts of practical ways. It is not utopian, but there is a very strong sense of interdependence and community that undergirds everything. It is about community. A real community is defined by how it looks after its most needy.

In the past year or so, I have also enjoyed the great privilege of visiting two other very contrasting communities. The Faroe Islands have long been a favourite place for me. Let me state now that if this Parliament ever decides to establish the post of cultural ambassador to the Faroese, I would appreciate advance notice because you will have my CV by return of post.

The Faroe Islands are a stunningly beautiful place that is culturally rich and materially affluent, too. If Scotland is, indeed, the best small country in the world, the Faroe Islands are surely the best even smaller country. However, even there the poorest are looked after, with the sea's harvest being distributed equitably throughout the community. A real community is defined by how it looks after its most needy.

The other place that I visited is close to the hearts of many folk here. Malawi, which is one of the poorest countries in the world, is crippled further by the HIV pandemic. Tea pickers earn about 30p on a good day. In the more remote communities, services and facilities that you and I take for granted are non-existent. In the urban squalor, everything is about existence rather than life in any meaningful sense. It is iniquitously relentless poverty.

Despite that, I again witnessed countless examples of people who have virtually nothing giving sacrificially to those who have literally nothing, caring for the poorest, including the excluded, healing the broken and restoring the discarded. A real community is defined by how it looks after its most needy.

When Jesus said, "Whatever you do to the very least amongst you, you do also to me," he was not presenting us with some cryptic parable. He was simply identifying himself with the poorest, most marginalised and rejected members of society, and saying that they are the priority.

If we are truly a Scottish community today, however we define that, we, too, will find ourselves defined by how we look after the most needy. That is a challenge not just to policy makers or churches, but to the whole Scottish community. A real community is defined by how it looks after its most needy.

May God bless you all as you build community for Scotland. Amen.

Thank you for the opportunity to share those thoughts.

British-Irish Council

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): The next item of business is a debate on motion S3M-2767, in the name of John Swinney, on the British-Irish Council.

14:34

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): Just over a month ago, the Scottish Government hosted the 11th British-Irish Council summit. The meeting was chaired by the First Minister, and took place in the historic surroundings of Hopetoun house, South Queensferry. The Government welcomed the opportunity to bring together in Scotland ministers representing all of the delegations of the council for the first time since 2002.

As members know, the council was established under the Good Friday agreement on 10 April 1998. The council enables members to exchange information, consult and co-operate on areas of mutual interest. Its members are the British and Irish Governments, the Scottish Government and those of Wales and Northern Ireland, and Jersey, Guernsey and the Isle of Man.

We were pleased to welcome a number of ministers to their first summit meeting. It was the first summit of Brian Cowen, the Taoiseach of Ireland, and Peter Robinson, the new First Minister of Northern Ireland. We were also pleased to welcome the recently appointed Chief Minister of Guernsey, Lyndon Trott.

Today's debate gives us the opportunity to report to the chamber on the work of the summit, the productive and useful discussions that took place, and the outcomes that followed. It is also a chance to hear how Scotland is contributing to the valuable work of the council.

The Government has placed a copy of the communiqué from the council in the Scottish Parliament information centre. It summarises all the subjects that were discussed by the council, and the outcome of those discussions. A number of items were on the council's agenda for the day. They included demography, energy, and other aspects of the future work of the council. I will set out the details of the discussions on those subjects in turn.

Peter Peacock (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): I should say that I am a veteran of a couple of British-Irish Council summits.

I note that the motion states that the Government believes that the council is an invaluable forum for strengthening intergovernmental relationships. I agree with that. However, in its future work programme, will it

address issues of common culture and language, particularly the development of minority languages such as Scots Gaelic, Manx Gaelic and the languages of Jersey and Guernsey?

John Swinney: Mr Peacock makes a fair point, which I take seriously. The issues that he mentions provide a vivid illustration of the sort of joint working that can be done by the various Governments in the council, and the Scottish Government would be happy to advance those issues in future discussions of the council's work programme. However, as Mr Peacock will find out when I get to that part of my speech, the future work programme already contains more than a couple of issues to be discussed.

Before I deal with the items that were discussed by the council, I advise members that, in addition to the pre-arranged agenda items, the First Minister, as chair, took the initiative to create space for discussion of the global financial and economic issues that were clearly at the forefront of all minds around the table. Brian Cowen, the Taoiseach of Ireland, had flown in to join us directly from talks in America with the United Nations and other institutions about those issues, and was able to provide us with the very latest intelligence and his reflections on the situation. The seriousness of the international situation was becoming increasingly apparent, so the meeting of the ministers of so many Administrations gave us an opportunity that could not be missed.

A number of key points arose from our discussion. The first was that action was needed quickly to stabilise the financial framework and reintroduce liquidity into the system. The second was that the council recognised that the real scope for co-operation among members would be in co-ordinating efforts to deliver that stability and help our economies to recover in the long term, once some level of stability had been achieved. There was recognition around the table that sustained action would be needed to stabilise the situation. There was a welcome view that our shared experiences could be brought to bear in vital areas of economic activity that would be central to recovery, such as housing, energy efficiency, and support for small businesses.

The council was in agreement that it shared deep concerns about the impact of the global financial crisis on the real economy, and welcomed international efforts to stabilise the situation. It discussed the measures that were being taken by each country, and we outlined the plans for Scotland to address the much more challenging economic climate that we now face.

We made clear at the summit—and I make clear today to Parliament—that the Scottish Government is committed to doing everything in its power to reduce the effects of the economic crisis

in Scotland. It is clear that the global economic slowdown is now being felt in Scottish homes and high streets and, given that the United Kingdom is expected to enter recession, that is likely to continue for a considerable period of time.

George Foulkes (Lothians) (Lab): I welcome the cabinet secretary's participation in the summit, and I find everything that he says to be of great interest. However, as the First Minister was clearly the main man—I remember the pictures of him on the steps of Hopetoun house, welcoming delegation after delegation as if it were the G8 summit—why is he not here today? What is more important for the First Minister than reporting to Parliament?

John Swinney: As the member will know, the First Minister regularly updates Parliament on all his activities. He will have the opportunity to do that at First Minister's question time tomorrow; I am sure that if George Foulkes is able to catch the eye of the Presiding Officer—if such a concept exists in this Parliament—or even to press the correct button, which is a rare privilege on the Labour side of the chamber these days, he can pursue that point with the First Minister then.

The Government has made it clear that we will take action to stabilise the economic situation in Scotland and to support householders and businesses that are facing difficulty. The Scottish Government's economic recovery plan includes a number of key actions to support the domestic economy: reshaping our capital expenditure; intensifying our activity and support for homecoming Scotland 2009; ensuring that all Government activity, including that on planning and regulation, supports economic development; intensifying our work on energy efficiency and fuel poverty; increasing advice to businesses and individuals; and improving financial advice to vulnerable individuals.

We set out at the summit the different steps that we intend to take as an Administration to support the development of the Scottish economy in these difficult times, and other countries contributed fully to that discussion. We have identified the action that we can take within our current responsibilities, and we will pursue that in the Government's future agenda.

In addition to seizing the opportunity at the summit to make progress on the economic agenda, we had a substantive debate on important items that had already been scheduled for discussion. As I said earlier, the principal items included demography, energy and the future work of the council.

In relation to demography, the council noted the progress that had been made on migration issues. There was consensus that that was a valuable

area of work in which all parties had a strong interest in joint work. The council endorsed further work that will take place on the impact of migration, healthy independent ageing, fertility and student flows. Our colleagues from Ireland offered to take the lead in sharing information on measuring migration, and Northern Ireland offered to lead work to disseminate research on migrant workers.

There was a ministerial meeting devoted to that topic in March, when ministers discussed the advantages of each Administration having a degree of flexibility in their approaches to encouraging migration. The discussion was developed further, and we were happy to cite evidence from a study of the success—which we intend to build on—of the fresh talent Scotland scheme that was initiated by the previous Administration.

The council explored the possibility of extending that approach, or adopting similar approaches, to give graduates and young people in general from abroad more opportunities to contribute their skills to the workforce in Scotland. Under the current constitutional settlement, migration policy relating to all parts of the UK is ultimately a matter for the UK Government, but the council agreed that specific ideas on the issue will be considered further at the summit in Cardiff next year.

Brian Adam (Aberdeen North) (SNP): Was the opportunity taken to discuss the difficulties of employing chefs in the UK? Those difficulties presumably also apply to Ireland, as they enjoy their curries just as much in the Republic as they do in the UK. Is that the kind of initiative that could provide a new opportunity to build on the fresh talent scheme?

John Swinney: That particular issue did not crop up at the summit, but there was significant discussion about the issue of migration.

The most substantive item of the day, on energy, was prompted by our proposal to initiate a new work stream on the potential for joint approaches in the area of renewables. A copy of the scoping paper that we submitted to the council was provided to the Parliament shortly before the summit. I assume that some members have had a chance to consider it.

The council agreed unanimously that energy is an important subject for a future work stream. Given the potential breadth of the subject, however, there was some discussion about the focus and scope of the required work. Links with the environment work stream were also raised. It was widely recognised that the scope of a work stream on energy could be broad. Delegations gave examples of areas that it could investigate, including the effect of energy policies on climate

change, the nature of technological advances, the capital investment that is required, and a range of issues to do with security of supply and grid connectivity. However, some common ground emerged on the desirability of considering the potential for further advances involving renewable energy, and on the issues of supply and connection that were raised.

As part of the discussion, the First Minister offered to develop the proposals in greater detail for further consideration at the next summit. Picking up on the common ground that emerged during the discussion, he emphasised that the focus should be on taking joint approaches to realising the potential for marine and other renewable sources of energy and on considering the cross-border implications of that.

The council agreed that further work was required to develop a more detailed and defined proposal for consideration at the next summit. The Scottish Government will prepare work to submit to the council and ensure that there is enough co-operation and understanding for BIC colleagues to come to a conclusion at the summit in Wales next year. All the indications are that this is the right time to make progress in the area, and we wish to ensure that the council takes up the opportunity to do so. The Scottish Government aims at all times to be a positive and proactive partner in the council's work. That is why we made the proposal on energy, and we look forward to discussing the matter at the next summit in Wales.

In my response to Peter Peacock, I mentioned that the council also considered its future work programme. It agreed that early years would be adopted as a new work stream to be led by the Welsh Assembly Government. The council also considered proposals for two new work streams on digital inclusion and child protection. To make way for those, the council agreed to wind up other work streams on tourism, the knowledge economy and e-health. The discussion about the work programme sparked off further suggestions that the council should discuss housing and spatial planning at future meetings.

The Government welcomes the opportunity to participate in the work of the British-Irish Council, which was founded in the optimism of the Good Friday agreement of 1998. The council provides a unique opportunity for the Administrations of the United Kingdom to share ideas and experiences and discuss the issues and aspirations—

George Foulkes: And Ireland.

John Swinney: The United Kingdom and Ireland, I should say. I am grateful to Lord Foulkes for his helpful addition to my speech. He is always helpful.

The First Minister used the opportunity of the summit to extend the warmest invitation to every member of the British-Irish Council to join Scotland for the year of homecoming in 2009. We look forward to members of the council taking up that invitation as much as we look forward to further dialogue at the next summit in Wales.

I move,

That the Parliament acknowledges the successful summit meeting of the British-Irish Council at Hopetoun House; notes the outcomes of the summit in relation to demography, energy and the ongoing business of the Council; notes also that the Council gave consideration to the global economic situation; believes that the Council is an invaluable forum for strengthening intergovernmental relationships; supports the Scottish ministers' proposal to lead a workstream on renewable energy, and encourages them to continue to support the Council in addressing issues of real and common concern.

14:49

Lewis Macdonald (Aberdeen Central) (Lab): I apologise to the Presiding Officer and to Mr Swinney for missing the very beginning of his remarks, but I listened closely to everything else that he said.

Today's debate could have been an entirely consensual one if only Scottish Government ministers had been able to resist temptation in drafting their motion. Members on all sides welcome any evidence of the success of the British-Irish Council. When ministers here in Scotland report on a successful meeting of the council, we are all encouraged by that. When Mr Swinney's motion states that the council is

"an invaluable forum for strengthening intergovernmental relationships",

we could not agree more. To be such a forum is precisely the point of the council, which was created to reflect the new devolved arrangements in the government of the United Kingdom and assist with the development of a shared approach to public policy in the island of Ireland and between our countries.

For a devolved Scotland, the council provides valuable opportunities to build both bilateral and multilateral relationships with both sovereign and devolved Governments within these islands. That is all valuable, whether people support the devolution settlement in the United Kingdom or want a different relationship among its constituent parts.

In order for the arrangement to work to the mutual advantage of all concerned, it is essential that it is based on mutual respect among all the parties and proceeds on the basis of consensus and therefore, implicitly, on the basis of compromise and a willingness to resolve unresolved issues in a way that is acceptable to all

the Governments concerned. What is not required is for Governments to negotiate in public or to seek to outbid one another in demonstrating their commitment to shared objectives by praying in aid the endorsement of their respective Parliaments for their negotiating positions. The temptation to do that appears to have proved too great for Scottish National Party ministers to resist this afternoon. The British-Irish Council has agreed that energy is an important shared concern and that it should be considered by member Administrations. One view, which has been advanced by Alex Salmond and today by John Swinney, is that energy should be a stand-alone work stream and that it should be led by Alex Salmond. As has been alluded to, another view is that the best way to address energy issues in these islands is in the context of climate change and the environment and that the existing environment work stream, led by the UK Government, should be widened to encompass energy issues. As has been said, the issue was not resolved at the summit meeting at Hopetoun house and it was agreed to continue the discussion the next time that the council meets, which will be in Cardiff in February.

It is reasonable for Alex Salmond to lobby other members of the council in the interim if he wants to persuade them that there ought to be a separate work stream on energy or that the Scottish Government is best placed to lead it. However, what is not reasonable and may prove to be counterproductive is for ministers to come to the Parliament to seek to demonstrate a consensus in support of a particular view, when clearly none exists.

There was no vote on the matter at Hopetoun house, nor should there have been. That is not how the British-Irish Council works.

John Swinney: Nor could there have been.

Lewis Macdonald: Indeed. There neither could nor should have been a vote. The origins of the council lie in moving away from the entrenched positions of the past to build a new and consensual approach. It is sad but perhaps not entirely surprising that the SNP chooses to risk that ethos of consensus and of resolution by discussion rather than division. By bringing to the chamber today a motion that seeks support for a lead being taken by the Scottish ministers in an area that is still under discussion in the British-Irish Council, the SNP Government may well have undermined not only the spirit of consensus in the council but its own negotiating position with other member Governments. It is just possible that those who observe these matters from Dublin, Cardiff or Belfast might have been prepared to consider the position advanced by Mr Salmond but been worried that an energy work stream led by

SNP ministers could conceivably be exploited politically to create fresh grievances for the Scottish ministers to express against Westminster.

Christopher Harvie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): Can Mr Macdonald explain the attitude of the Irish Government towards the fuel policy of the Government in London?

Lewis Macdonald: I can assure Professor Harvie that the Irish Government has not expressed a view on the issue that we are debating today: the nature and leadership of a work stream dealing with energy issues within the British-Irish Council. That is what we are debating and the Irish Government will express its view on the matter in the context of the British-Irish Council, as it and all member Governments of the British-Irish Council should do.

If there were worries before today about the possibility of SNP ministers exploiting the lead on energy to create political divisions with Westminster, those will surely be multiplied following the SNP's decision to lodge for debate a motion in these terms. Whatever the outcome of today's debate, other member Governments will know that SNP ministers have chosen to use the Parliament to negotiate in public, to use a discussion in the British-Irish Council as a platform for raising issues that may cause contention within the United Kingdom and to ensure that there is a vote and a division in this Parliament on an issue on which it could as easily have sought all-party support.

There is, of course, another reason why other member Governments might have been worried about a proposal that Scottish ministers should lead a separate work stream on energy—I refer to the anxiety about the Administration's actual delivery of support for renewable energy, to which I now turn.

There is much to be said for the argument that Scotland's unique position, which comes from our strengths in oil, gas and the offshore industry and from our enormous renewable energy potential and support for developing technology, makes us well placed to lead in the area. I certainly agree that all those aspects of Scotland's energy industry are important. Sadly, however, the reality is that, although the Administration talks a good game on renewable energy, there are critical areas in which it has signally failed to deliver. Ministers never tire of saying how enthusiastic they are about renewable energy or of claiming credit for investment decisions that private companies made three or four years ago and for projects such as the Glendoe hydro scheme, to which ministers in the previous Administration consented.

The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): Well done.

The Presiding Officer: Order. I am sorry to interrupt, Mr Macdonald, but I expect front-bench members, including ministers, to set an example by not making sedentary interventions.

Lewis Macdonald: However, ministers neglect to mention their failure to deliver consents for nearly half the wind energy developments that have come to them for approval since May last year. As recently as last Friday, at the end of a Scottish parliamentary recess, we learned from the press that the Scottish ministers had rejected another wind power application. The Kyle wind farm in Ayrshire could have delivered an additional 85MW of renewable capacity to the Scottish grid. What happened adds to the lengthening roll of failures to deliver on wind power, which is currently the only proven renewables technology that is capable of allowing us to reach our renewable energy targets for 2020, which were set with cross-party support.

John Swinney: Will Mr Macdonald acknowledge—he should, as he is, if I remember rightly, a former energy minister—that it is impossible for certain wind farms to be approved because of other planning considerations, such as objections from the air traffic control authorities, as in the case of the Kyle proposals? Would the Government not be criticised by people such as Mr Macdonald if we did not follow the evidence that was put in front of us? Perhaps he should reflect on that observation and balance his remarks.

Lewis Macdonald: I acknowledge the point that Mr Swinney makes, but the point that I am making is that if people want to demonstrate their commitment to renewable energy, they must demonstrate a willingness to find solutions to the problems that arise. I am afraid that that has not happened in the case in question.

Everyone is, of course, aware of the ministers' rejection of the Lewis wind farm project. If that project had been approved, the wind farm would have been the largest in Europe and would have provided much-needed work and income in one of our most peripheral areas. Fewer people may have registered the decision that was taken last year to reject the proposed Clashindarroch wind farm in Mr Salmond's constituency or the rejection of the proposed Greenock and Calliachar projects. Ministers have not explained the implications of their decision to reject the Lewis application without formal consideration of the social and economic benefits that that development would have brought. A decision to reject an application that was based on the availability of alternative wind farm sites elsewhere in Scotland and treated

any intrusion on a Natura 2000 site as unacceptable has serious implications for the rest of Scotland's renewable energy potential. When official figures become available, they may prove that the level of interest in investing in renewable energy projects under this Administration has gone down rather than up, for the good and simple reason that the current record of projects considered and determined so far shows that there is a 45 per cent chance of rejection at the hands of the Scottish ministers.

Many good projects will not come forward for approval until ministers finally announce their conclusions on upgrading the mainline grid connection between the north and south of Scotland—I refer to the link between Beaully and Denny. The industry will tell ministers, if they trouble to ask it, that consent for that proposal is essential to further renewables development in the north of Scotland—not only for future onshore wind developments but to fulfil the enormous potential of offshore wind, wave and tidal power, which is largely concentrated in the Highlands and Islands and off our northern coasts. Mr Swinney will, of course, rightly say that there are planning considerations and procedures that must be gone through, but I hope that he will tell us at the end of the afternoon that a decision on the link between Beaully and Denny is imminent in order to allow the renewables industry to bring forward further good proposals that he and his colleagues can approve. That would be the single most important thing that ministers could do today to signal their readiness to give a lead on renewable energy. Perhaps then, other Governments in these islands will take their aspiration to leadership in the field a little more seriously.

I move amendment S3M-2767.1, to leave out from "Scottish ministers" to end and insert:

"proposal for the Council to take forward a workstream on renewable energy; encourages Scottish ministers to work in co-operation with all the members of the British-Irish Council, and encourages them to continue to support the Council in addressing issues of real and common concern."

15:00

Ted Brocklebank (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Even those who have only a nodding acquaintance with Irish history will be aware of the Scottish connection with the human and political tragedy that unfolded in Ireland in the centuries following the enforced plantation of Scots in Ulster by King James I. It is interesting to note that the 70 noblemen and approximately 8,000 tenant settlers came largely from Ayrshire, yet the territorial ambitions that they were sent to consolidate were historically English. King James's quest to exterminate Gaelic and Catholicism with his Ulster plantation was a development of an earlier

scheme to hand over the island of Lewis to incoming Protestants from my home county of Fife—the so-called Fife adventurers, who were supposed to bring prosperity and civilisation to the papist Western Isles. That scheme, too, delivered only bitterness and division.

There was also a tragic symmetry between Ireland and the Scottish Gàidhealtachd when the potato harvest failed in the mid-19th century and countless Scots, Irish and Ulster Scots were cleared to the new worlds of the Americas, Australasia and South Africa. Canada's founding Prime Ministers and many of America's Presidents were distinguished products of that diaspora. So as well as having a language and much history in common, the Scots and Irish, although choosing differing political paths, had to find ways in which to emerge from the huge shadow of the then most powerful nation in the world—England. The Scots and Irish are connected by far more than anything that divides us.

It seems to me that the British-Irish Council, which at the time seemed a bit of an afterthought to the Good Friday agreement, could turn into an extremely valuable institution. Not only might it help to heal the wounds of Ulster, but it could allow Ireland to play a role in the economic future of these British isles without compromising its independent status. Equally, we argue that Scotland as a devolved parliamentary democracy is ideally placed to play a distinctive role in the council that is complementary to those of the devolved Executive of Ulster and the National Assembly for Wales, without compromising Scotland's position in the United Kingdom.

Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind): Was that role helped by the intervention of the Secretary of State for Scotland, Mr Murphy, with his comments about the success or otherwise of the Irish Government in managing Ireland's economy?

Ted Brocklebank: I will come to the Irish economy later, so I ask the member to keep patient until then.

We believe that co-operation between the council's constituent parts should never be to the detriment of other members; nor should the council be used as a vehicle for unilateralism. However, facts are chieftains that winna ding, and the hard fact is that Ireland is the fourth largest export market for the UK, after the United States, Germany and France. The UK is also the number 1 destination for Irish foreign direct investment.

As would be expected, Ireland is the fifth largest export market for Scottish goods and services. Since 2007, both countries have been working together on enterprise and business development and, as we have heard, on energy policy in particular, as part of the European Union cross-

border programme, which is worth around €200 million and includes Northern Ireland. As part of the fund, the then First Minister Jack McConnell and the Irish Taoiseach committed Scotland and Ireland to working together to promote the role of science in enhancing economic growth and to address issues of common concern, such as the misuse of drugs and the challenges of changing demographics. Ireland, like Scotland, has a large and hard-working immigrant community—a very far cry from the days when Scotland's immigrant workforce was largely Irish.

On energy, it makes sense for Scotland to be involved with our near neighbours across the Irish Sea in developing new offshore technology and a possible new transmission network. Both partners have much to offer in know-how and shared tidal and wave advantages, within the context of energy being reserved to the UK Government. However, it is disappointing that the Scottish Government continues to rule out new nuclear power stations for Scotland, despite the fact that Ireland is considering kick-starting its own nuclear energy programme.

VisitScotland reports that Ireland is the fourth largest market for tourism in Scotland after the United States, Germany and France. Apparently, Dublin and Edinburgh share the accolade of stag and hen-night capitals of Europe. Scotland and Ireland can achieve much through co-operation.

In response to Margo MacDonald's point, with much of the froth wiped off the Guinness these days, there should be a lot less talk about Ireland's tiger economy and so-called arcs of prosperity that include Ireland and Norway. Ireland's prosperity has been largely funded by the EU, but the euro is no safer from market fluctuations than any other currency. Ireland's banks have recently guaranteed customer savings, but there is widespread scepticism about the country's ability to honour that promise. [*Interruption.*] Mr Swinney laughs, but I have the statistics in front of me. The collapse in Irish house prices, the consequent decimation of the local construction industry and unemployment are more severe than anything that we have seen yet in the UK.

It is interesting to note that even Irish economists such as Paul Sweeney are urging caution about the Scottish National Party's separatist route for Scotland. Professor Sweeney—not Swinney—issued a stark warning only this week:

"In terms of going independent I would say be careful of what you wish for ... The transfer of wealth from south east England to other parts of the UK is necessary and shouldn't be something to be ashamed of".

Bill Wilson (West of Scotland) (SNP): I wonder how many Irish economists are recommending

that Dublin gives up independence to become part of the Westminster system.

Ted Brocklebank: We should pay particular attention to the professor's words. Let us remember that the SNP's most recent economic predictions for an independent Scotland were based on oil at \$150 a barrel. I checked before I came to the chamber today, and oil is trading at \$60 a barrel, which is considerably less than half that sum.

We note with interest the 11 key issues that were discussed at the recent British-Irish Council meeting at Hopetoun house and are in broad agreement with much of what came out of that gathering. As Churchill said,

"To jaw-jaw is always better than to war-war."

We also recognise that the forthcoming meeting in Cardiff in February 2009 will have a rather more challenging agenda, given the likely global economic Armageddon at that time. However, we have no doubt that the member countries of the British-Irish Council will be better placed to deal with the economic downturn if they work from a position of co-operation.

Divisive posturing by any of the participating Governments would be hugely counterproductive and we urge the First Minister and his team to contribute to the Cardiff summit on a consensual and pragmatic basis—rather as the Scottish Conservatives are doing in relation to today's Government motion, the amended version of which we will support.

15:07

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): I will further expand on the Irish dimension to which others have already referred in the debate. As some members know, my wife is Irish and comes from County Armagh. For a long time, I have gone over to Ireland several times a year—or even more often. In that time, I have seen a massive change, not least in County Armagh.

To explain to those who do not know, Armagh is a border county that is just inside Northern Ireland. With its big Roman Catholic minority population and its distinctive dialect, which sounds very like that of Monaghan in the Republic of Ireland, one might argue that Armagh looks as much towards the Republic as towards the United Kingdom. As historians will know, partly because of its physical location, Armagh has witnessed some of the most appalling terrorist shootings and bombings, particularly in south Armagh, which is the part that is nearest Monaghan. I am sad to say that I have heard the report of a shot and distant explosions, and I know people who have lost loved ones. I

remember the worst of times when much of the centre of Armagh was blackened and ruined. Not very long ago, one had to be careful which way one went in Northern Ireland, and what one said.

Despite the background of helicopters clattering overhead, armed patrols in the streets and vehicle checkpoints, my wife and I were always amazed by the fact that our three children, who spent a lot of time in Ireland with their relatives when they were growing up, were completely oblivious to the situation. That was miraculous. It was not until they were in their late teens, when they spotted three burned-out buses on their sides near Drumcree—members will recall the standoff between the Orange marchers and the republicans who did not want them to march through the streets—that they noticed that there was something strange about Northern Ireland that made it different from Tain in Easter Ross. I was grateful for that, because it meant that we could avoid answering awkward questions.

My experience of Ireland makes me incredibly grateful for the way in which things have changed. The change has been literally incredible. If somebody had told me in the 1980s that the situation in Northern Ireland would have changed so dramatically by today, I would have had great trouble believing them. However, it is true that terrorism and tragedy are things of the past. Peace and good will have prevailed. I can walk the streets of Armagh and stop and chat to people in the same way that I would in Scotland without any fear touching me, which is verging on the miraculous.

The debate is about the British-Irish Council. I set out the historical background just so that we would remember what went before. The council was set up to be a forum for the UK Government, the Irish Government and the devolved Administrations to meet and co-operate. Let us remember that it was because of the troubles—an expression that deeply understates what that period was all about—that the triumph of the Good Friday agreement came into being. The council grew out of that.

The willingness by all parties to ignore religious, political and national differences and to work together contributed to the success that we see today. That is surely the great strength of the British-Irish Council.

Margo MacDonald: Does the member recall that the preference outlined by President McAleese when she visited us here was that the council should be called the council of the isles? The council has lost something in being called the British-Irish Council. There is no romance there. There is nothing in that name to lift our spirits; it sounds like just another political talking shop.

Jamie Stone: Of course, we in the Highlands are romantic. That is typified by me and by John Farquhar Munro, although he is perhaps not in quite such romantic form at this precise moment. *[Laughter.]* I apologise to the Parliament. Believe it or not, we in the Highlands still refer to the council as the council of the isles. I had better move on.

Renewable energy, climate change and health have been mentioned. Those are some of the issues that the council is thinking about, which is entirely appropriate, given that global warming and pandemics do not respect borders or lines on maps. If we do not work together on such issues, we are in deep trouble indeed—together, we sink or swim.

I take an interest in Ireland and the British-Irish Council for family reasons. I put on record my personal thanks for peace breaking out in Ireland. If nothing else, I thank those who have made life safer for the people who I care about. I am sure that many of us have relatives in Northern Ireland. Peace is hugely important.

I return to where I started. County Armagh is transformed. It is a cheerful place; it is like Tain or Edinburgh. The nub of the matter is that a new generation on the other side of the Irish Sea is growing up in the same way that children grow up in Scotland, England or any other part of the British isles and is enjoying the same freedom from fear and terrorism. It is worth remembering that the British-Irish Council has been part of that.

As we move into the future, good new work is being done on the fronts that I have mentioned and on other fronts, to which I am sure that other members will allude.

The Liberal Democrats do not find the language of the Scottish Government's motion difficult, so we will have no problem supporting it.

I imagine that my colleague Liam McArthur will touch on the issue of renewable energy. I did not do so because I took up time painting the historical background. However, that does not mean that the issue is not of the greatest interest to me and my constituents.

15:14

Aileen Campbell (South of Scotland) (SNP): The British-Irish Council has grown in importance and stature since it was established formally in December 1999—a few months after the establishment of our own Parliament here in Edinburgh. That is no mere coincidence. The council is part and parcel of the historic constitutional changes that have taken place across these islands over the past 10 years. The establishment of the council was a key plank of the Good Friday agreement and contained within

its vision the foundation of a new kind of relationship between the nations and peoples that share what Roman historians called the islands of the northern ocean.

The council's role has become even more important in the past 18 months as new parties have come to power in Scotland and Wales, and as Northern Ireland's Executive has adapted to major changes of personality and leadership.

It is appropriate for us to hold this debate in light of the most recent summit of the council, which was held here in Edinburgh last month, as John Swinney said, and which was chaired by our very own First Minister, Alex Salmond.

As the motion before us indicates, the council has discussed a number of important and constructive topics, and I wish to examine some of them in a wee bit more detail. I was particularly interested in the council's work on demography—the Scottish Government is taking a lead in that area. Societies across western Europe are facing major challenges as the population ages and patterns of migration change. Such trends begin to affect every aspect of public policy, from education provision to pensions and social security.

I welcome the fact that the council is examining the effects of our changing demographics and that it is able to pool the experience of its member countries so that we can learn from one other. I am always impressed by the way in which Ireland has inspired many of its citizens, who left the country many years ago for one reason or another, to return and make hugely valuable contributions to its economy and society. I commend the Scottish Government's efforts to reactivate our own diaspora, and I look forward to the role that the year of homecoming will play next year.

The council has begun to consider the common challenges and opportunities that are presented by the changing demand for and supply of energy. Again, the Scottish Government has sought to lead on that for the council. Contrary to what others think, I believe that that is very appropriate, given our huge contribution to traditional fossil fuel industries and to emerging renewable energy markets, across not just the UK and Ireland but Europe.

I hope that the Government and the council will work closely together on finding ways to improve the ability of small-scale renewable energy producers to connect to the national grid. Many exciting opportunities and projects in the South of Scotland area that I represent and across the country fall at the first hurdle because the cost of connection is so high at present.

The recent summit discussed the global financial situation, which has changed rapidly even in the

few weeks since the summit was held. As the First Minister pointed out recently, Ireland, one of the council's members, has an economy that is 40 per cent better off than that of the UK. Despite what others may think, it is in many ways better prepared to cope with the effects of the global economic downturn, and I hope that members across the chamber will condemn posturing from UK Government politicians who have recently sought to insult Ireland and other small, independent countries in Europe by somehow declaring them insolvent.

George Foulkes: I am one of those UK politicians who insult people from time to time.

Can the member explain exactly what she means when she says that Ireland's economy is "40 per cent better off than that of the UK"?

Aileen Campbell: I refer to gross domestic product performance. I add that Scandinavian countries have not experienced the levels of poverty that we have experienced, and we should learn from all our independent small-nation neighbours. Ireland is certainly one of those. Ireland is not insolvent, nor is it too poor or too small to stand on its own two feet.

When we debated the Scottish Broadcasting Commission in the Parliament, we spoke about how Scotland could be better served in that area, whereas Ireland's RTÉ is going from strength to strength. Scotland has to ask permission from the UK Government to sit in the room during European negotiations, whereas Ireland's representatives are at the top table of the European Union, the United Nations and all the other international bodies that it chooses to co-operate with, including, of course, the British-Irish Council.

As a young student nationalist, I was lucky enough to attend—along with my friend and colleague, Jamie Hepburn—a meeting of the interisles forum, which was established by St Columb's park house in Derry and which brought together the youth wings of the major political parties in the UK and Ireland. It was useful for us to learn first hand about the pressures experienced by political activists in the north and the south of Ireland and, at a youth level, it brought together into one room people who were sworn enemies at the time—the Democratic Unionist Party and Sinn Féin. The nature of that interisles forum was to break down barriers and to provide participants with the chance to learn from one another and to acknowledge their different approaches to politics.

I welcome the opportunity that we have had today to discuss the role that the British-Irish Council plays in our politics and society. It undoubtedly provides a welcome forum for

exploring areas of common interest between the many Governments and jurisdictions that are represented on it. I am confident that the council's role will continue to evolve and strengthen, especially as the devolved Administrations of Wales and Scotland continue on their respective paths to greater powers, autonomy and independence.

15:20

Hugh Henry (Paisley South) (Lab): I start by going off at a tangent. The Scottish diaspora and the homecoming have been mentioned, and there is no doubt that the homecoming will be significant. We take great pride in the number of people who identify with their Scottish ancestry and with Scottish history although they were born elsewhere—indeed, some of those people, such as Rod Stewart, identify themselves as Scots. We take great pride in that, so it is sad that there are still some people in this country who condemn others in this country as traitors for aligning themselves with the Irish diaspora. We have some way to go to face up to problems that are being addressed as part of the British-Irish Council process and the Good Friday agreement.

Margo MacDonald said that the British-Irish Council sounds like a political talking shop, and I am sure that many members of the public are wondering why we are spending half a day discussing it. However, Ted Brocklebank and Jamie Stone put the issue in its proper perspective. Jamie Stone talked about the north of Ireland. I do not know whether members watched the television programme last night that was presented by Eamonn Holmes, who was born and brought up in Northern Ireland. He talked to people who grew up in Northern Ireland and went on to make it big in show business and television about what it meant to grow up in such an atmosphere. He drew a sharp contrast between what it was like to be young in Northern Ireland in the past and what it is like in the current environment, in the absence of fear, guns and intimidation. A product of the Good Friday agreement of 10 years ago that we should celebrate is that people in these isles can grow up in a much safer and more secure environment than the one in which previous generations grew up.

However, the process has not finished. Last night's television programme, which showed the peace wall in Belfast, demonstrated that communities are still divided and that fear and suspicion remain. There are still people who do not talk to one another. There is a legacy of the suspicion of sectarianism, which we have sometimes seen in this country and which we must deal with here. We should use the product of

the peace process—the Good Friday agreement—to reinforce the benefits that we in this country can gain from it and we should try to consolidate the gains that have been made in Northern Ireland.

Ted Brocklebank was right to talk about our shared history. He talked about the contribution that migrant workers made in Scotland and the contribution that Scots and Irish people made elsewhere in the world. We have shared experience and knowledge of the consequences of migration here and in Ireland. Is it not better to discuss the issues together than to allow some of our communities to inflict violence and mayhem on others?

Margo MacDonald: I agree with much of what Hugh Henry said. However, does he include in the lessons that we can learn from one another the lessons on multiculturalism that might be learned by Irish people, who are perhaps just that bit behind us? I set my question in the context of the homecoming. We share with the Irish a diaspora that includes many people with dark skin, who are the descendants of slaves in the southern United States and the West Indies. Those people are part of our diaspora, too.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): I stress to members that we should try to stick to the motion on the British-Irish Council. We seem to be straying a little from the matter under debate.

Hugh Henry: Others may have done so, Presiding Officer, but I think that the issues that I am raising relate specifically to the British-Irish Council.

I would not want to suggest that the Irish are behind us in multiculturalism, although they have perhaps come to some of the issues of inward migration later than we did.

The British-Irish Council allows us to share knowledge, experience and best practice. As a minister, I was involved in some discussions on the problems inflicted by illegal drugs on all our societies, including Jersey, Guernsey and the Isle of Man—places that members might not immediately think of as experiencing problems with drug abuse. We can pass on to them some of the experience that we have gained. Indeed, we can show some of the other Administrations that we are ahead of the game in many issues, but we can also be big enough to accept that there are things that they have done before us—recovered assets in the Irish Republic, for example—from which we can benefit.

Unfortunately, procedural issues need to be addressed as part of the sharing of experience. I hope that the cabinet secretary can give us some further information on the working relationship between the BIC and the British-Irish

Parliamentary Assembly and on whether there will be a permanently staffed secretariat. If we can contribute anything to making the body work better, we will all gain from it.

Aileen Campbell is right: 10 years of shared practice has been significant. The Labour Government at Westminster took a courageous step, not just in devolving power in the United Kingdom but, carrying on from the previous Government, in engaging in the peace process in Northern Ireland. We are living with both the consequences and the opportunities that those courageous decisions have brought.

Although, as Margo MacDonald suggested, the British-Irish Council sounds like a political talking shop, the fact that we can point to stability and security in Northern Ireland, the like of which has not been known for generations, certainly makes that political talking shop worth while.

15:27

Brian Adam (Aberdeen North) (SNP): The British-Irish Council will undoubtedly help in building relationships between not just the various Governments but the peoples. It is important that bridges are built and, with the involvement of the devolved Assemblies and Crown dependencies since 2001, we are pushing at an open door, particularly with our friends from Ireland.

The council is not just about the difficulties that were so well articulated by members who spoke earlier or about the north-south relationship; it is about the future and east-west relationships. It is in that context that changes have taken place in the body parallel to the British-Irish Council. In the past few days, the unionist parties in Northern Ireland have finally decided to join the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body, and they have been made most welcome.

If the Presiding Officer will allow me a certain leeway, I can tell members about changes that it will be useful for them to be aware of. The British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body has agreed to change to the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly. That is one of that body's work strands, building on the various agreements among the Governments, in which Scotland has played a leading part. Indeed, Presiding Officer, you have made a major contribution, and Scotland has taken the lead in developing the new set of rules and principles on which the new body will be founded.

I am grateful that other members have referred to the Nordic Council and the council of the isles. Those are appropriate comparators for the relationship between the British-Irish Council and the new body. We need to develop an appropriate relationship that allows not only for Governments

to meet and propose work but for them to be held to account. The appropriate mechanism for that is certainly the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly. Much of its work has been done in parallel with work by the various Governments, not least on energy, which is part and parcel of the motion.

Perhaps, when the cabinet secretary makes his closing speech, he might reflect on the Scottish Government's view of the new relationship between the British-Irish Council and the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly. There are discrepancies in the accountability of some of the other bodies on which the UK is represented, and it might be appropriate not only to have a debate about the British-Irish Council but for the Parliament to take a keener interest in what those of us who represent it in the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly are up to. Perhaps we need to consider how that might best be developed.

The disagreement that exists is unfortunate. I suggest that the Government's motion is not at all unreasonable and is in no way insensitive. The only real recent example of insensitivity in east-west relations is the suggestion made by the current Secretary of State for Scotland that Ireland should somehow be regarded as insolvent. Suggesting that Scotland's Government might wish to take the lead in developing appropriate strands of work for the British-Irish Council strikes me as sensible, and seeking endorsement for that from the Parliament is a sensible and sensitive approach. However, to go around suggesting that our friends across the Irish Sea are in an insolvent country while the GDP of the UK, let alone of Scotland, is considerably less than Ireland's is undoubtedly insensitive.

Lewis Macdonald: I simply ask Brian Adam whether he agrees that the amendment in Michael McMahon's name is also reasonable. Do he and his colleagues intend to accept it?

Brian Adam: So far, no one from the Labour benches has accepted that it is reasonable for the Government to seek to lead on renewable energy, and I do not see any reason why we should support the amendment. It strikes me as a rather petty and party-political amendment that tries to deliver an agenda that is unrelated to the Parliament's or the Government's relationship with the BIC and is much more to do with what the Labour Party has to say in connection with its friends and colleagues in London. If some of the other Labour members who wish to contribute to the debate have a different perspective, perhaps the Government and members of the Government party might take a different view, but I have heard nothing so far to support their doing that.

Given Lord Foulkes's great interest in the matter and the fact that he has two opportunities to

express his view, I hope that he will encourage his group's business manager, whether here or in the House of Lords, to allow him to participate in the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly. I am sure that he would have an interesting contribution to make.

15:35

David Whitton (Strathkelvin and Bearsden)

(Lab): I am happy to take part in today's debate about the work of the British-Irish Council. I will speak in support of the amendment in the name of my colleague Michael McMahon, to which Lewis Macdonald alluded.

As it happens, I attended the first meeting of the gathering back in December 1999—almost nine years ago—albeit in a different capacity. The cast list of those attending makes interesting reading now. The event was chaired by the then Prime Minister, Tony Blair; the then Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern, was also there. The UK Government was also represented by the then Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Peter, now Lord, Mandelson. Scotland was represented by the late Donald Dewar and his then deputy, Jim Wallace. The council's inaugural meeting was an important—some might even say historic—step towards the implementation of the Good Friday agreement. It started the development of the network of relationships that exists to this day, and it was an honour for me to be there.

Today I want to focus on the social inclusion aspects of the BIC's work. It was agreed that Scotland and Wales should take the lead on those issues, which are truly universal. Poverty and income disparity seem to know no borders—they do not distinguish between Scottish, Welsh, Irish, British or any other nationality. Deprived communities, no matter where they are located on the globe, share many of the same challenges. Those who live in poverty lack resources, which precludes them from having a standard of living that society regards as acceptable. As a result of inadequate income and other resources, people may be excluded and marginalised from participating in activities that are considered the norm for others in society. We are striving to eliminate societal barriers and to give everyone an equal opportunity to succeed, no matter where they live.

Both national Governments and each of the devolved Administrations agree that social inclusion is a worthy cause and that the creation of a fair society for all should be the ultimate goal. My purpose today is not to give another speech on why poverty is bad; but there is a need to repeat that the problems of income disparity are a top priority in the current economic climate. A mere three days ago, the Catholic Bishops Commission

for Education in Ireland stated:

"It is how we deal with the most vulnerable that defines our society."

That message was repeated today by the Rev Iain MacDonald at time for reflection. The bishops said that our interactions with the impoverished help to define the success of our nation.

During this time of global economic strife, the poor of our nations will be put through the wringer of economic turmoil. Making ends meet will become that much harder for those who already live week to week. Others have lost their jobs due to tightening economic conditions, as companies are forced to lay off workers. In the modern era, all nations are tied together economically. The current global economic woes have shown clearly that if one country slips, others soon follow. Over the past few months, global markets have resembled dominoes and countries big and small have succumbed to the effects of the credit crunch.

A glance at the newspapers of the past few days reveals that social inclusion is proving to be a pressing issue in the passing of the Irish budget. There has been much criticism of the current austerity budget, on the basis that it will target the most vulnerable in Irish society. The budget plans to implement cutbacks in funding for primary education, health care and support for the elderly. The current economic trouble can and will act as a wedge between social classes in every nation, widening the rift between the wealthy and the poor. Naturally, that destroys the principles of social inclusion that we have fought hard to protect. Social inclusion is meant to reduce inequalities between the least advantaged groups and communities and the rest of society, by ensuring that support reaches those who need it most. The number of people who need support has expanded in recent months and may grow even more. Our reaction to the troubles that we are experiencing will show the true colours of our nation and of the members of the BIC.

At its previous meeting in May, the BIC identified four new areas of interest for its social inclusion group: older people and long-term care; homelessness and affordable housing; the voluntary and community sector; and migrant workers. I would welcome a progress report on those issues from the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth when he sums up. The budget in the Republic of Ireland reveals that the credit crunch can impact on social inclusion. Learning is rather difficult without the proper funds that are needed to buy books. The cuts are also said to affect those who will have the most difficult time in Irish schools—those who do not speak English. That clashes with the BIC social inclusion group's goal of helping migrant

workers, including their children. In the area of long-term care for the elderly, one third of over-70s will not qualify for a medical card on means-tested grounds if the budget is applied retrospectively. Therefore, 10,000 elderly people a year will now lose out on what was one of the most progressive moves of recent years. The economic crunch has forced the Government to make tough decisions, which hurt the most vulnerable in society.

Those are just a few examples of the problems that could slow the progress that has been made on social inclusion. Clearly, how we address such issues during the current time of struggle will test the minds of those on the BIC in the coming months.

If we got into this economic trouble together, we must work together to start correcting the issues. Social inclusion is a nationless problem. Although many have praised the Irish economy for its success in recent years, the current budget turmoil shows that no economy is perfect, especially during a global downturn. We are all economically interconnected. Therefore, we must work together through multilateral organisations such as the British-Irish Council to tackle the issues of social inclusion.

Since 1998, Scotland and Wales have helped to lead the British-Irish Council's progress on social inclusion. When the council was formed, we agreed that its purpose was

"to promote the harmonious and mutually beneficial development of the totality of relationships among the peoples of these islands."

A key aspect of the council is that we work together to fix our issues. As members of the British-Irish Council, we have committed ourselves to progress in the area of social inclusion. The social problems stemming from the recent economic downturn are issues that we must all continue to work together to solve.

15:41

David McLetchie (Edinburgh Pentlands)
(Con): As we all know, the British-Irish Council is part of the architecture of the peace process that we hope has brought to a close the troubles in Northern Ireland. The council has contributed to the building of confidence in parliamentary institutions, democratically elected Government and the rule of law and to the fostering of economic and social relationships among peoples from different traditions and different religious persuasions who live on the island of Ireland.

Although today's debate looks to the future, it would be churlish and remiss of the Parliament not to recognise the contribution to that process that was made by the Governments of Lady Thatcher,

John Major and Tony Blair as well as by a whole host of secretaries of state for Northern Ireland. Thanks to their foundational efforts, working in partnership with the Government of the Republic of Ireland and the political parties in Northern Ireland, we are able to focus today's debate on a British-Irish Council meeting that considered issues of common interest to all the various Governments and Administrations. Those issues included energy and the environment, drug abuse, social inclusion and transport, which are areas in which there is scope to deliver real benefits to all our citizens.

I have been a member of what was called the British Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body since this devolved Parliament was admitted to full membership of the body back in 2001. Although the body's antecedents lie in the Anglo-Irish agreement of 1985 rather than in the Good Friday agreement of 1998—for that reason, the body was boycotted by the unionist parties in Northern Ireland—the BIIPB has now transformed itself, as Brian Adam mentioned, into the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly. The Deputy Presiding Officer, Alasdair Morgan, will recall moving a motion to that effect at the BIIPB's meeting last week. He also played a part in drafting the new assembly's constitution, for which we thank him.

When the new body meets for the first time in its new format in March next year, its membership will include representatives from both the Democratic Unionist Party and the Ulster Unionist Party. That is a signal step forward, a coming of age and a sign of confidence in the stability and permanence of the Northern Ireland Assembly and Government. For those of us who have attended BIIPB meetings over the past eight years, such a change is most welcome, as it enables us to move away from the politics of the peace process to the politics of economic and social progress.

One issue that the new assembly will need to consider is how its work might dovetail with that of the British-Irish Council and monitor the activities of the Governments and Administrations that make up the BIC. In particular, the assembly might want to look at the areas that the council has identified for co-operative joint working. The assembly could bring to those issues a parliamentary dimension that fosters accountability and scrutiny of decision making.

Arguably, the British isles should have, and should have had, a British-Irish Council at governmental level and an interparliamentary assembly without the troubles and the peace process needing to act as a catalyst for their establishment. Many point to the Nordic Council as a model and I agree with that.

There is now a real opportunity to prove the worth of such institutions, divorced from their

troubled origins. However, as with all constitutional processes, we need to walk before we can run. The enthusiasm that has greeted the creation of the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly has led some to claim that it should become the primary forum for interworking communications between all the Parliaments in the United Kingdom and Ireland. I do not intend any disrespect to our friends and neighbours in the Republic or the Crown dependencies, but I suggest that there is a good deal more to be done in fostering governmental and parliamentary relationships here at home before we head off too enthusiastically in that British isles direction.

For example, it is appalling that there is no proper forum for the discussion of issues between Scotland's MPs and MSPs. It is appalling that there has been next to no dialogue between Her Majesty's Government and its ministers and this Parliament, and the same could be said of Scottish Government ministers and relevant Westminster committees. It is appalling that the system of joint ministerial committees was run on such a haphazard basis by HM Government and the previous Scottish Executive under three Labour First Ministers.

It seems to me that we have a great deal of catching up to do in promoting better relationships in our own country of the United Kingdom, so that, as far as possible, we speak with one voice as a sovereign nation in councils and assemblies with ministers and parliamentarians of the sovereign nation of the Republic of Ireland. Until we get our own house in order and are working together co-operatively, we will struggle to make substantial progress in the British isles institutions.

Our friends in the Republic of Ireland are not the mediators of a peace process between Holyrood and Westminster. We cannot hope to achieve results in an international body unless we have a defined position as a united nation. That brings me to the amendment in Michael McMahon's name, which Lewis Macdonald moved. I support that amendment because it pays due respect and gives due regard to the processes that have hitherto governed the operation of the British-Irish Council, and because it seeks to excise from the motion a text that highlights a division of opinion between the Scottish Government and HM Government.

There might well be much value in the various Governments and Administrations undertaking a work stream on renewable energy as suggested by members of the Parliament. I note that two work streams on tourism and e-health that were undertaken by the British-Irish Council have now been completed, so there should be scope to examine new areas of work. However, as Lewis Macdonald explained, HM Government has some

issues with how the work stream on renewable energy is defined and undertaken, and how it should be led. Thus, it is still to be agreed by the British-Irish Council. Accordingly, it would be premature and inappropriate for the Parliament to take a position on the matter, and I hope that the SNP will have the grace to accept that.

I will support the motion if it is amended.

15:48

Jamie Hepburn (Central Scotland) (SNP): Like others, I welcome the opportunity of today's debate to discuss the importance of the British-Irish Council, or, indeed, the council of the isles. Like Margo MacDonald, my ardour is probably stronger for that styling than it is for the body's official title. However, I welcome the chance to discuss the importance of the council to the current constitutional framework in these islands and to look ahead at the role that the council might play in future.

The council is adapting to changing times. New Governments have been established in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and the Republic of Ireland has a new Taoiseach. More than ever before, a diversity of political opinion is manifested at the council by Governments and legislatures that are determined to move their countries on. For example, the National Assembly for Wales is on the path to becoming a Parliament more like our own, and the British-Irish Council gives its representatives a chance to learn from and about its counterparts in Scotland and the other participating Parliaments and Assemblies.

Wales and Scotland are not the only stateless nations at the council. I look forward to the day when there is more wide-ranging representation from England. Of course, that is a matter for the people of that country to decide but, perhaps in years to come, we could look forward to meeting representatives from an English Parliament or some form of regional body, instead of their being subsumed into a delegation on behalf of the United Kingdom Government.

I note that it was the Secretary of State for Wales who represented Her Majesty's Government at the recent summit meeting in Edinburgh. Like other members, I wonder when the new Secretary of State for Scotland will be brave enough to show his face at a meeting of the council, given that he will find himself having to explain to the Taoiseach why he thinks that Ireland is insolvent.

We are used to unionists such as the new Secretary of State for Scotland and, it seems, Ted Brocklebank talking down the legitimate aspiration of independence for their own country but, in recent weeks, new tactics of talking down other

countries, such as Ireland, have been added to the unionist armoury against Scottish independence. That ties in with the employment against independence of the language of separation, which is used to suggest that independence will result in Scotland somehow being cut off from her neighbours and the international community.

However, it is the secretary of state's own Government that helped to establish the British-Irish Council as a valuable and practical example of genuinely international co-operation. When Scotland achieves its independence—

Jamie Stone: If.

Jamie Hepburn: Not "if", but "when". When that happens, I imagine that the council will have even greater importance and stature as a forum for the nation states of Scotland, Ireland and whatever is left of the United Kingdom to discuss and take action on matters of common concern.

Hugh Henry: Will the member not reflect on the fact that the debate gives us an opportunity to consider progress and co-operation? Perhaps for once, all of us, collectively, could put aside the opportunity to highlight division.

Jamie Hepburn: I suggest that the member's party should ditch its amendment so that the Parliament can act with one voice at decision time.

It is apparent from the council's work to date that it is already taking action on some matters of common concern. In particular, that was demonstrated during its recent meeting here in Edinburgh.

I welcome the Government's drive to introduce energy as a work stream of the council and, in particular, the focus on managing and promoting renewable energy among the council's constituent members. I am somewhat at a loss to understand the opposition that exists in the Parliament to the proposition that our Government should lead that work. Scotland is well placed to take advantage of the massive renewable energy potential that our natural environment offers, while ensuring that such developments are in harmony with our landscape and environment. In that area, the council provides a forum in which we can learn from and work with our nearest neighbours for the benefit of all.

Another related area in which the Scottish Government is demonstrating that it leads the way among the nations of these islands is that of climate change. Not only is the Government leading the way on renewable energy, but recently the cabinet secretary announced a further strengthening of the climate change bill, which will probably make it one of the most ambitious and exciting pieces of legislation in that area in the world. I have no doubt that at future meetings of

the council, ministers from the other Administrations will want to discuss that important matter.

I note the wide range of continuing work that was discussed at the summit. In particular, I welcome the lead that the Scottish and Welsh Governments are taking in the area of social inclusion. The council has examined the different initiatives to tackle child poverty that the various Administrations have adopted. In that regard, I particularly welcome the Scottish Government's commitment to provide free school meals for our youngest children by 2010. Many members of all parties will agree that that is one of the most socially progressive policies that our Parliament has the power to introduce. It will be looked at with interest, if not a degree of envy, by colleagues from other council countries. Indeed, I understand that the UK Government is so inspired by our proposal that it has announced its intention to instigate a pilot of free school meals in England in due course.

At its recent meeting, the council discussed the global financial situation, as has been mentioned, and ministers from all sides expressed deep concern about the effect that it is beginning to have on the real economy. It is good to know that the council was able to have a constructive discussion on the issue and to agree on some areas of common concern. Unfortunately, it was disappointing that only a few days later Ireland was derided as being an insolvent country and was cited as a warning to Scotland about what we would face under independence. For the sake of harmony and consensus at future meetings of the council, the Secretary of State for Scotland should think before he speaks.

Like my colleague Aileen Campbell, I have had experience of the co-operation that the council aims to promote through my participation some years ago in the interisles forum for the youth wings of political parties across these islands. That indicated to me the positive results that dialogue across these islands—often between people and parties that have traditionally been bitter enemies—can bring.

Today's debate has been a useful opportunity for us to look at the positive contribution that the British-Irish Council can make to the relationship between the Governments and Administrations that exist in these islands. In its discussions on energy, social inclusion and the global economic situation, the council has given ministers from our Government and our neighbours a chance to speak candidly and constructively about the challenges that we all face. I look forward to the council growing in stature and importance, just as our Parliament is growing towards having the normal status of independence.

15:55

Charlie Gordon (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab): I will concentrate on the transport-related issues that were discussed at the British-Irish Council meeting, and will focus on transport links between Scotland and the island of Ireland.

Transport issues that were discussed at the council meeting of 26 September this year included the mutual recognition of driving disqualifications and lesser driving offences, and research into drugs and driving. Previously, the council had discussed transport links between the Administrations, including restoration of the ferry link between Ballycastle in Northern Ireland and Campbeltown in Argyll.

Transport links between Ireland and Scotland go back a long way. On 21 February 2008, one MSP—I think it was Keith Brown; he can tell us in a minute if it was not him—asked a question of the First Minister following his statement about a British-Irish Council meeting. In his question, he alluded to such links having helped to establish the ancient Celtic kingdom of Dalriada in present-day Argyll. The First Minister demurred on the question of the re-establishment of the kingdom of Dalriada, which presumably dashed the hopes of Jamie McGrigor MSP, who must be the heir apparent for that kingdom.

I remember, as a boy—a slightly less long time ago—standing beside the Govan ferry during the school summer holidays to watch the 9 pm ferry from Glasgow to Belfast sail past. In those days, there were also shipping links between Ardrossan and Belfast and Glasgow and Derry. Some of those links ceased to operate in the 1970s.

In 1990, I was part of a delegation of councillors from Strathclyde Regional Council that went to Donegal, which is the county of the Republic of Ireland that contains the most northerly part of the island of Ireland. We discussed Donegal County Council's aspirations to restore shipping links to the west of Scotland, and we even inspected ports in Donegal for that purpose. That particular initiative did not bear fruit, but we have a number of other transport links between Ireland and Scotland. Leaving aside the significant aviation links, we have ferry services to Larne in Northern Ireland from Stranraer, Cairnryan and Troon. We await developments in the efforts to restore the link between Ballycastle and Campbeltown.

Hugh Henry: Leaving aside the cheap flights that are provided by Ryanair and, sometimes, Aer Lingus, does the member agree that the prohibitive costs of the ferries on the routes that he mentioned—to Northern Ireland from Stranraer, Cairnryan and Troon—inhibit the passage of people between those areas? A comparison with the much cheaper fares between the south of

England and France puts those outrageous fares into perspective.

Charlie Gordon: I accept that that is a problem, which the members of the British-Irish Council will have to address for environmental and many other reasons. I hope that Hugh Henry's recent summer holiday plans were not spoiled by such high costs.

On 21 February, the First Minister correctly reminded Parliament that the route from Ireland to Stranraer and, through England, on to continental Europe is a Euroroute, which is to say that it is a route of international significance, and there are aspirations to improve the surface transport links across Scotland from Stranraer, Cairnryan and Troon. Some of those aspirations were reflected in the Parliament's European and External Relations Committee report of 2006, which included suggestions to improve road and rail links from Stranraer and Cairnryan to east-coast ports such as Rosyth. I wish to add the suggestion that there should be better links from Troon and to Grangemouth.

With regard to passenger tourism and moving freight onto rail—for environmental benefits, as well as for many other potential local benefits—the development of the Glasgow crossrail project, which would link south-west Scotland to the east of Scotland and potentially the north of Scotland, merits strategic consideration as a potential new Euroroute.

My views on, and experience of, such transport issues draw on my time in the then Strathclyde Regional Council, but members will be relieved to hear that I am not at this stage pressing for the restoration of Strathclyde—neither the old local authority nor the ancient kingdom of Strathclyde with its capital at Dumbarton, the boundaries of which stretched as far south as north Wales. I remain hopeful, however, about the elevation of Glasgow to a city-state, but that is a debate for another day.

16:01

Keith Brown (Ochil) (SNP): It is slightly alarming to think that Charlie Gordon has a better recollection than I do of the questions that I have asked in Parliament, but I will take his word for what he says.

I am pleased that we are debating this issue today. Having read the motion, I thought that there would be more agreement than disagreement but—alas—that has not been the case. Labour and Conservative members on the front benches—I excuse the back benchers who have spoken—have made fairly puerile attacks on independence. I was genuinely interested to find out what division the Labour amendment sought to highlight, in order to see whether it was anything

more than the usual default position of decrying any lead that is taken by the Scottish Government. It reminded me of somebody—Baroness Thatcher—who I know inspires our current Prime Minister. She said:

“Where there is discord, let there be harmony”,

but instead we seem to have the opposite, in the manufacturing of a fairly synthetic amendment to try to draw a division.

The new diversity—which Jamie Hepburn spoke about earlier—within the British-Irish Council has led to a new sense of purpose and energy in engagement with other such bodies, and with other institutions within the European Union. Like Jamie Hepburn and Margo MacDonald, however, I would prefer the title of council of the isles.

I am one of this Parliament's members of the European Committee of the Regions, and the commonalities and the common interests of the nations and Governments in the British-Irish Council are very obvious when one engages in that committee, which has 27 members from the 27 EU member states. One very quickly finds oneself—as I recently did—in the company of people from Ireland, Northern Ireland, Wales and England. At the recent meeting, a Plaid Cymru member of the National Assembly for Wales, a Liberal Democrat member of the House of Lords, a Labour member of North Lanarkshire Council, a number of the Irish representatives and I all quickly found each other's company, because there is a great deal of shared history and neighbourliness between our countries. That is natural, and we will have to keep hold of it even once Scotland becomes an independent state. It will be in all our interests to ensure that we are still good neighbours, and that we collaborate in areas of common interest.

One of the lessons from the European Committee of the Regions that the British-Irish Council exemplifies is the fact that interregional and international groupings are the way in which most countries in Europe seek to exert their influence. The Irish, of course, are past masters at that, but I recently had an approach from a French provincial representative who was seeking to establish a new North Sea grouping within the European Committee of the Regions because of the shared interests there. Even large states such as France, therefore, recognise that interregional and international groupings are the way to find common interests and to promote those interests through international bodies. That is very much in the spirit of the British-Irish Council, and there is no reason why the things that that body discusses cannot be used to promote the interests of its constituent parts in other bodies.

It seems to me that the increased prosperity in Northern Ireland since the peace agreement and the development of the council holds out opportunities for the other parts of the body. What is important in that regard is not just prosperity—which goes further than the British-Irish Council and relies on European Union and United States support—but the engagement that now exists. For example, there is now much more familiarity with the situation in Northern Ireland in the other parts of the islands that we inhabit. People in Northern Ireland often felt that they were known for only one thing, but the multidimensional nature of Northern Irish society is much more to the fore these days. That is certainly what they would say.

However, I can tell Parliament of the bemusement and, indeed, anger among Irish representatives about allegations that have been made—especially by somebody called Murphy—that denigrate the Irish Republic. Those allegations have really hit home among people in the Irish Government and Opposition parties. That will become more obvious as time goes on. It has been claimed that Ireland is in some way insolvent, yet it has the same problems with budget deficit and debt, on almost exactly the same scale, as the UK Government.

This might not be a popular cause, but I also decry the despicable bullying of Iceland by the UK Government. Iceland is not the only country that has had to be bailed out by the International Monetary Fund.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I think we are getting away from the British-Irish Council, are we not?

Keith Brown: Well—you never know. Future expansion is a wonderful thing.

Countries sometimes have to be bailed out by international organisations, as the UK was under a previous Labour Government.

To return to the motion, the British-Irish Council is one of the few intergovernmental organisations that is not a club for independent countries only. In that respect, it is an invaluable forum for strengthening intergovernmental relationships—prior, of course, to the establishment of Scottish independence.

The motion also refers to specific work on renewable energy. It has almost become a cliché to call Scotland the Saudi Arabia of renewables, but no one doubts that the future lies in low-carbon technologies, not just environmentally but economically. In the 1970s the business to invest in was plastics, in the 1980s it was oil, in the 1990s it was computers, and for most of the current decade it has been banking—believe it or not—but the business investment of the future will be renewables.

If Scotland is to realise its potential in that area, it needs transmission infrastructure. Some people conceive of that as a line of pylons snaking across the countryside from Beaulieu to Denny, through some of the most visually striking and historically significant parts of not just my constituency but the country. We heard something of that view from Lewis Macdonald. I would much rather endorse the Scottish Government's ambition to carry that power by sea.

Lewis Macdonald: Does the member agree that in the short term, and particularly in relation to programmes that have already been consented and await connection to the grid, there is simply no time to wait for new technologies in grid connection? What is needed is an urgent decision on the Beaulieu to Denny project to allow the connection to be made so that we can export power.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I urge Keith Brown to keep more or less to the motion.

Keith Brown: The process for determining such applications has been in place for some time, although it is about to be overhauled. The fact that the public inquiry on the project was the longest-ever public inquiry in Scotland perhaps gives us some idea why the project has taken so long. I do not argue against it, but I hope that the line will be undergrounded in my area, at least.

As we saw in the Westminster Government's intervention to prevent Scottish Government ministers from even daring to speak to their Norwegian counterparts, responsibility for transmission of power is jealously guarded. Through the British-Irish Council, however, Scotland has a chance to speak for itself.

I look forward to development of the British-Irish Council project in the years to come—it is clear that it has still to reach its full potential, as David McLetchie pointed out. It is a young body that was set up in different circumstances from those which it faces now, but it is a forum for valuable work that challenges us all. It is a continuing reminder to Scotland that we do not have to be parochial, and it is the foundation of what we hope will be a rebuilt 21st century relationship in these islands.

16:09

George Foulkes (Lothians) (Lab): Like others who have spoken, I recognise the importance of the work of the British-Irish Council, which brings together not just the United Kingdom but Ireland, Jersey, Guernsey and the Isle of Man. I say to Ted Brocklebank that it is preferable to speak of “these islands”, as Keith Brown did, rather than “the British isles.”

Although I recognise and do not underestimate the work of the British-Irish Council, I am—as Hugh Henry is—a little bemused, if not astonished, that after a two-week recess when Parliament did not meet at all despite our being in the middle of a global economic crisis, we are spending the whole afternoon talking about a meeting of the British-Irish Council. It seems astonishing that we have nothing more important to talk about when the school building programme is grinding to a halt, there is no sign of the Scottish Futures Trust and the Government has no idea about ways to help small businesses through the crisis.

There is also a crisis in relation to the concordat as the councils say that they cannot afford the so-called free school meals that we have heard about. That is not to mention the shortfall in the funding of free personal care that we heard about at the Audit Committee this morning.

John Swinney: Can Lord Foulkes explain—since he now has renewed zeal for supporting small businesses—why he and his colleagues did not support the Government's budget this year, which has dramatically reduced the costs for small businesses from business rates in Scotland?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: In responding to that point, can George Foulkes relate it to the British-Irish Council?

George Foulkes: I notice that the Presiding Officer has been intervening in relation to that point. I would never challenge the Presiding Officer, but I do not know whether he has read the British-Irish Council communiqué. The council meeting considered the whole global economic climate as well as demography, transport, the misuse of drugs and the environment—just about everything.

Let us come to the global economy. On previous occasions, British-Irish Council meetings have been dealt with by a statement and questions. It is astonishing that we now have a whole afternoon to discuss one. In the context of the British-Irish Council meeting, some SNP members are sensitive about some remarks that were made about Ireland. I will not say anything disparaging about Ireland but—as my good friend David Whitton pointed out in his excellent speech—although the Irish economy is not in freefall, it is not the Celtic tiger that we used to hear Alex Salmond and his cronies talk about.

Iceland is effectively almost bankrupt. SNP members defend Iceland despite the fact that people here in Scotland are suffering as a result of the greed of some Icelandic bankers. Of course, SNP members then mention Norway. Keith Brown would like us to talk to Norway. I would also like us to talk to Norway, because the Norwegians would probably say directly to Alex Salmond what they

have said through the *Daily Mail*, which has the headline: “Salmond slapped down by Norway minister”. A Norwegian minister said that he should not use Norway as an example because doing so causes problems between Norway and the rest of the United Kingdom. He effectively accused Alex Salmond of lying in some of his comments. That is the kind of reaction that you will get—sorry, not you, Presiding Officer—well, it could be you, but other—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Just because the British-Irish Council discussed almost everything does not mean that the debate is about almost everything. The member should refer to the motion.

George Foulkes: The motion refers to the communiqué.

Margo MacDonald: Will the member give way?

George Foulkes: I will give way as I was going to mention Margo MacDonald.

Margo MacDonald: The member might not do so after my intervention.

If we can no longer describe the Irish economy as the Celtic tiger, how should we describe the British economy? Is it a bulldog economy?

George Foulkes: I did not say how I was going to describe Margo MacDonald, but I was going to mention her.

I want to come to energy, because it is important and is mentioned in the amendment and motion and has been raised by members of other parties. I found it particularly astonishing that Jamie Stone, from Caithness, said that the Liberals will support the SNP leading on the energy stream within the United Kingdom. The SNP is against any kind of nuclear power. Consider the hypocrisy of its position. When EDF took over British Energy, which is principally a nuclear power generator, Alex Salmond had the gall to say, “Keep your headquarters in East Kilbride”—a party that is totally against nuclear energy wants the headquarters of a nuclear energy business to be in East Kilbride. How can Jamie Stone support people who make such arguments?

There was also a completely false renewables day, when Alex Salmond said that the installed capacity of renewables is now exactly the same as that of nuclear power. What a load of nonsense. Installed capacity is meaningless in that context. We do not have all the windmills going at the same time and creating the same amount of energy in every part of Scotland. It is the base load that matters, and the base load is provided principally by nuclear power as well as by traditional power; it is certainly not provided by renewables.

We should consider the wind farm applications that have been turned down, as my colleague Lewis Macdonald said, and the fact that the Scottish Executive is doing nothing about biomass, wave and tidal energy. It is doing just a little on carbon capture and hydrogen fuels, but nothing about offshore wind power. However, it claims that Scotland is the renewables capital just because of a number of wind farms, a little bit of hydro power and a new hydro scheme.

Christopher Harvie: The British Government sold British Energy to France's state-owned power company. Does that mean that it has been doing its bit for the advance in nuclear energy?

George Foulkes: We are talking about the first of our nationalisations. We started with energy and now we are nationalising the banks—that might have been noticed. Energy was taken into public ownership. Professor Harvie misses the point: we are talking about a Government that is completely against nuclear power, but wants the headquarters of British Energy, which is principally a nuclear power generator, to remain in Scotland. I want its headquarters to remain in Scotland, but my views are entirely consistent with that, as I support new and replacement nuclear power stations in Scotland. I hope that Jamie Stone will persuade his colleagues to think again, because the Liberal Democrats are going up a dangerous track.

I see that the Presiding Officer wants me to conclude, so I will. There seem to be a lot of bodies elsewhere—they are not here—who are not quite as enthusiastic and knowledgeable about the British-Irish Council as all of us here are. I wonder where they are. I am sure that we will find out the result of their efforts one way or another in a week or so.

16:17

Angela Constance (Livingston) (SNP): I feel that I have drawn the short straw in following Lord George Foulkes. I wonder whether I am one of the less knowledgeable and enthusiastic individuals to whom he referred. I will, of course, resist the temptation to respond to many points that he made; I say only that we all have our fair share of greedy bankers.

I am delighted that the recent summit meeting of the British-Irish Council took place at Hopetoun house in South Queensferry. The setting was fitting and beautiful—indeed, Hopetoun house is Scotland's grandest stately home. Unfortunately, it is not in my constituency, but it sits on the edge of West Lothian, which beats at the heart of Scotland—it certainly does so for me, anyway.

The British-Irish Council is built on partnership, mutual respect and co-operation. Having listened carefully to Mr Swinney's opening remarks and

studied the motion, I am somewhat disappointed, although not too surprised, by some of the more negative and paranoid comments about mischievous Scottish ministers—as if Scottish ministers would ever be mischievous. Leading the way on some energy work is not exactly the stuff of revolutions. Scotland has a lot of expertise in the oil and gas industry, and it is fitting that we should lead the way on matters such as carbon capture and storage. The United Kingdom Government is, of course, a partner in the British-Irish Council, and I assume that it would have agreed to Scotland leading the way on such work, as I understand that business is—rightly—done on the basis of consensus.

Lewis Macdonald: Does the member recognise that the point of the amendment is that such agreement has not yet been reached and that Mr Swinney's motion is therefore premature, as Mr McLetchie said?

Angela Constance: I am not sure that I understand the point of the Labour Party's amendment, as the Government's motion is fairly uncontentious.

It has already been mentioned, and it is fitting to remember, that the British-Irish Council sprang up under the terms of the Good Friday agreement, which is probably the most positive aspect of Tony Blair's legacy. Forgive me, but I cannot help commenting on the irony that the man who worked so hard for peace in Northern Ireland was the same man who took us into an illegal war in Iraq. Of course, as we know and have heard this afternoon, politics and politicians are full of contradictions.

As other members have done, I commend the detail of the good work that the British-Irish Council undertakes. I have a particular interest in the on-going work on migration. I come to the debate as a Scot of Italian extraction. The experience of Italian Scots is similar to but different from that of our fellow Irish Scots. My great-grandfather, at the age of 12, was put on a boat to leave Italy and told that he was going to America. Luckily for me, he ended up in Blackburn in West Lothian. On a more serious point, it is important that migration is discussed and addressed positively and pragmatically, because we need migrants to fill the skills gaps in certain areas of our economy. The participating nations in the British-Irish Council have different needs when it comes to migration. The debate must be framed positively, not pejoratively with talk about British jobs for British people, which Gordon Brown said at his party's conference last year and which a recently appointed minister reiterated.

The work on digital inclusion is welcome. Parts of West Lothian, including the village in which I reside, do not have access to broadband. It is

interesting that only 50 per cent of Scottish households have broadband and that 73 per cent of disabled adults do not have access to broadband at all. In the digital age, internet access and broadband are pivotal to improving the quality of life and economic and social participation. I look forward to hearing more about that work in due course and about the work on healthy independent ageing, which sounds good to me.

The concept of the British-Irish Council has always interested me, as a nationalist. It underlines the importance of, and the relationship between, the independence of a state and the interdependence between states. As the participating nations grow, develop and change in accordance with the political will of each country, the British-Irish Council will, I hope, also grow and change, irrespective of what it is called. It is worth noting that the relationship between the United Kingdom Government and the British-Irish Council is the best that it has ever been, notwithstanding recent comments about the Irish economy. I firmly believe that it is about two independent countries freely associating and co-operating as equal partners. There are many examples from Europe and throughout the world of independent nations working together on the basis of shared interest and geography and mutual benefit. For example, there is the Benelux economic union, which was set up after the second world war, and the Nordic Council, which has been on the go since the 1970s and which has achieved many great things.

Unsurprisingly, I look forward to Scotland participating as a fully grown-up and independent nation and discussing, debating and co-operating on a full range of issues. We want independence, not just because of what we can do for ourselves, but because of what we can do for others.

16:23

Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind): Angela Constance, in replying to Mr Macdonald on the Labour front bench, said that she could not see the point of the Labour amendment. I have been struggling to find the point of the debate. For a whole afternoon, we have discussed the British-Irish Council. I am sure that members agree that it is fascinating, but does it merit a full afternoon's debate when there are many other issues that we should and could be talking about? I mention that in passing.

Earlier, I accused—if we want to use that terminology—the council of being a bit of a talking shop. When I heard about all the things that are talked about, I wondered whether anybody mentions Rockall and who has sovereignty over it or the mineral and exploration rights. Does the British-Irish Council talk about that? That would be a good reason for having a meeting.

What about the issue that is diminishing the effectiveness of the repercussions of the Good Friday agreement? The Executive in the north of Ireland does not appear to be meeting properly. I wonder whether the council talked about that. The problem seems to be certain policing matters, and I would have thought that we could have shared our experiences; perhaps not. Perhaps one of the members who will sum up the debate will tell me whether that issue was talked about.

I wonder, too, whether anyone discussed the matter that was raised by Hugh Henry—why not the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands? If this is a council of the British isles—

David Whitton: They are in it.

Margo MacDonald: Are they all in it? That is fine—it is just that I had never heard anybody talking about them at all.

As I said, I wondered about the point of this debate. However, I have said that I prefer the nomenclature “the council of the isles”. It seems to imply a recognition of the distinctiveness of the different parts of the islands—including the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands. I was sorry to see that the name was dropped. I think that it was dropped for political reasons, although perhaps not.

All afternoon, we have rather tended to claim the Good Friday agreement, and the ending of hostilities in the north of Ireland, for British politicians. I think that David McLetchie was the only person who paid tribute to the work that was done by the politicians in the north of Ireland. A huge amount of work was done there, and we should all recognise that. While terrible things were going on in the north, and each community was doing damage to the other, Ian Paisley and John Hume could be spotted in wee corners of Brussels or Strasbourg, talking about what they could do together, covertly, to try to improve things. We also know from diaries that Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness were talking through back channels all through the troubles. We must not claim too much for the council of the isles as far as the ending of hostilities in the north is concerned.

I want to look ahead—and I think that it was Keith Brown who said that we should be looking ahead rather than looking back. It was good to hear the interpretations of history from different vantage points, but there are other ways of looking at things. If we look ahead, we will look to see what the council of the isles—as I will continue to call it—might lead to. David Whitton talked about the oneness of the isles and about how we had a real commonality when dealing with the real problems that beset the people in all parts of the islands. He talked about social inclusion, and I

could not agree with him more. Those are the kinds of issues that we can agree on.

Not until Keith Brown—who has form on such matters—mentioned the EU and the Committee of the Regions did anyone even think about talking about the EU. What David Whitton proved in his speech was the sense of seeing ourselves as an offshore group of islands in Europe that have much more in common with one another than we have with the rest of Europe—especially now that Europe stretches as far east as it does. We are a smaller and more homogeneous group, and I urge anyone who is thinking about how we can tackle the problems of poverty and of migration to bear that in mind. We have a common sea border, and that is the way in which we should approach the problems of mass migration, which will not go away. We are more likely to achieve a satisfactory agreement and a common policy by working through the islands than by working through the EU.

It was stated that we should work together to fix our issues. I absolutely agree. Once again, that came from David Whitton's speech. As I have just suggested, on issues such as social inclusion and migration, we can work together much more easily among ourselves. I am not suggesting being isolationist, but working among ourselves would allow us to reach policy agreements a lot quicker than would ever be possible through the EU.

The one thing on which I agree with David McLetchie is his implied cry for new relationships to be built. However, those new relationships have to be built on new institutions, which will be built on a new respect for our distinctiveness and equality as communities. We are not equal in size, but we are equal as far as our identities are concerned. We must drop the politics from the council of the isles—or the British-Irish Council, if we must call it that—and concentrate on meeting people who have the same interests as we have. We will not win Scottish independence through the British-Irish Council. I hope that we will take an independent part in the council in the future, but we will not win independence through it. I caution the Government to remember that.

16:30

Liam McArthur (Orkney) (LD): Unlike Messrs Peacock, Swinney and Whitton, I have no personal involvement with the British-Irish Council. However, having looked back at previous debates and listened to the speeches from Ted Brocklebank, Jamie Stone, Hugh Henry and others, I am struck by the council's historic significance and the valuable role that it has played over the past nine or 10 years.

Of course, historic is the current group of ministers' adjective of choice. Whereas in opposition, SNP spokespeople were prone to consider absolutely everything as a crisis, in government they tell us that even the most mundane of ministerial engagements is somehow historic.

By contrast, the British-Irish Council can rightly lay claim to be considered historic. Since its establishment, it has helped provide a forum for co-operative intergovernmental relations. The work that it has done has not always commanded the headlines in the media—that is difficult to achieve in the midst of a global credit crunch and on the back of the battle of Lesser Hampden. Nonetheless, the council can be proud of the work that it has done in tourism, the environment, immigration and a host of areas that David McLetchie touched on. Although Sir Jamie McGrigor of Dalriada's ambitions continue to be frustrated, the council has prompted greater mutual understanding and a commitment to collaborative endeavour. Moreover, it has been an innovative response to the changing relationships within the United Kingdom, which Lewis Macdonald highlighted.

Therefore, it has been encouraging to see the First Minister and his colleagues embrace the council. The SNP Government is not known for its warmth towards anything with the word "British" in the title and it is certainly more practised in the art of divide and rule than in the art of collaborative working, but its approach to date has been generally constructive.

As the motion highlights, the issue of renewable energy is now on the council's agenda. That is a timely addition to the council's work stream and we have no difficulty with the Scottish ministers potentially taking the lead on it. That reflects the forum's approach to other work stream issues. Given Scotland's track record in oil and gas and its potential across a variety of renewables technologies, not least marine energy, it has a great deal to contribute to discussions that will also need to focus on security of supply, connectivity, charging, reducing energy demand and localising generation.

David Whitton: Does Liam McArthur agree that it is up to the British-Irish Council to decide who leads the work stream and that it is not for this Parliament to tell it that?

Liam McArthur: I certainly agree that it is for the British-Irish Council to set its own agenda, but we should not shy away from putting on the agenda issues that we believe are important.

If Scotland is to take the lead, the Government will have to do a great deal more to match its

assertions and rhetoric to the reality of what it is delivering.

I have commented many times in the chamber on the failure of ministers to produce a coherent and comprehensive energy strategy. Since the election in May last year, the commitment to such a strategy has been if not dumped then, to take a charitable interpretation, progressively downgraded. We were told to expect an energy overview by the end of last year; I am told that it finally appeared last month. Similarly, the long-trailed renewable energy strategy was finally put out for consultation last month. In neither instance did ministers see fit to bring the announcements to the Parliament for debate and discussion. I hope that ministers plan to rectify that. To touch on the complaints of George Foulkes and Margo MacDonald, debating those subjects might have been a better use of our time this afternoon.

Sadly, that is part of a pattern. The First Minister himself was at it during his statement on the British-Irish summit in Dublin in February. My colleague Nicol Stephen asked:

"Does the First Minister expect to bring his paper on energy to the Parliament in any form before he presents it to the next British-Irish Council meeting?"

The First Minister replied:

"I would be happy to bring the scoping paper for a strand of discussion to Parliament to be discussed, because it contains issues on which I would like to secure maximum cross-party support."—[*Official Report*, 21 February 2008; c 6251.]

Those are fine words. I applaud the commitment, but the Government has not seen fit to honour it.

Of course, we would all accept that the First Minister has a great deal on his mind. The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth's comment about the consideration that is being given by summit members to the current financial and economic difficulties is welcome. In response to Mr Foulkes's concern about the First Minister's whereabouts this afternoon, I note that trying to play both sides of the argument in relation to the proposed takeover of HBOS by Lloyds TSB is a time-consuming business.

I congratulate all those who participated in the summit in Edinburgh, and I welcome the fact that Scotland was able to play host—again—to the council's most recent meeting. However, the fact that the First Minister chose to ignore his commitment to consult the Parliament prior to that meeting is a real concern and suggests that his commitment to cross-party consensus on the issue is a little flimsy. It also confirms the growing sense that the minority Government prefers tightly controlled set-piece briefings to proper parliamentary scrutiny and engagement.

The cabinet secretary referred to further work being undertaken based on the input of all delegations, and I hope that he will commit to bring that before the Parliament for proper scrutiny. Will the cabinet secretary confirm that a key part of that work stream—along with renewable energy sources—will be energy efficiency? All the parties that are involved in the council will have a keen interest in that issue, which is one on which the Scottish Government might be able to take a lead.

Despite the strides that were made by the previous Executive on energy efficiency, ministers appear to have squandered the opportunity to make early progress in a policy area that unfortunately appears to be the Cinderella of the energy debate. In the light of spiralling fuel bills, rocketing levels of fuel poverty and the fact that the cheapest unit of energy is the one not used, the Government's lack of progress on an energy efficiency strategy is not so much unfortunate as scarcely believable. I have no doubt that some difficult issues are involved, but it is an area in which the Government can be confident of enjoying cross-party support.

Scottish Liberal Democrats support the continuing work of the British-Irish Council, and we welcome the fact that the Scottish ministers have introduced a work stream on renewable energy, on which they intend to take the lead. For that reason, we cannot support the Labour amendment—although I fully support Lewis Macdonald's points about the need for ministers to work in co-operation. Like Ireland and Northern Ireland, which will take the lead on work on demography, Scottish ministers can take a lead on renewable energy in a co-operative fashion. Ministers must recognise, however, that taking a lead is about more than assertion and spin; it is about committing to working collaboratively with all parties in developing concrete actions to make progress on a crucial issue.

16:37

Jackson Carlaw (West of Scotland) (Con):

What a thrilling afternoon it has been. With the world in turmoil and Scots the world over burdened with financial concerns and real worries about their jobs and homes, we return from recess to discuss wallpaper. I share Lord Foulkes's astonishment and Margo MacDonald's bewilderment on that point. This has proved to be a subject debate in which virtually no one has chosen to talk about the subject. I hope that you will not admonish me, Presiding Officer, or require me to sum up by sticking to the context of the motion, because there would be very little to sum up on if I did that.

In the 18 months since I came to this place, this is the first occasion when I have participated in a debate and it has been difficult to identify where there was in fact any debate. I congratulate Michael McMahon on his perspicacity and genius—possibly not a tribute that regularly comes his way from a Scottish Conservative—in identifying a nuance around which to frame an amendment. Lewis Macdonald spoke to the subject with great verve and passion. It is undeniably true that the Administration rarely passes up a chance to display peacock plumage, although it would be churlish not to lend the Labour Party our support, if only to add real blood and excitement to this afternoon's exchanges. Lewis Macdonald made his point on the self-aggrandisement of the Government most effectively, particularly with the picture that he cast of Scottish ministers elbowing their way up the table to seize the chair and then expecting us to endorse them in their desire to lead on particular aspects of energy.

Many members, by way of filling in the available hours this afternoon, recalled recent history between Ireland and Britain. It is indeed remarkable to our generation that, in the early years of the 21st century, such a forum as the British-Irish Council should exist at all. That it should meet harmoniously and without controversy is certainly worthy of note, if not comment, let alone debate. Its very ordinariness and normalcy should surely be celebrated by regarding the council as an everyday matter, not a thing of wonder. I happily join members who have welcomed the fact that we have begun the new century by putting firmly behind us the mutual suspicions and antagonisms that coloured almost all of our joint history during the last, and that we have done so quite suddenly.

As a Conservative youth leader as recently as during the days of the blessed Margaret, I recall receiving an anonymous and rather intimidating note through the post making it clear that I would not be welcome in either the province or the republic—at least, I have always assumed that that was because of my being a Conservative youth leader, not in spite of it. Those days are gone, however, and links have flourished, as we always hoped they would. Such a turnaround demonstrates, just as the ending of apartheid in South Africa did, that breakthroughs can be achieved, however intractable and historic the diplomatic challenge. I would not be surprised to learn that Ken Macintosh and Jamie Hepburn are even now seeking to establish a council to resolve charity football disputes.

Given the history of the past century, it is extraordinary that the legacy of the Thatcher, Major and—without question—Blair Governments and their Irish counterparts is that lesser mortals

are able to gather and blether on matters of mutual interest without the public consciousness being unduly bothered.

Any diffidence on my part is about the debate, not the institution. We have allocated an afternoon to this matter, but it is interesting that other members of the council have made do with a written or oral statement—indeed, Westminster has made do with nothing at all. I listened with interest to Mr Swinney, who can usually be relied on to conjure up magic and interest on the most unlikely subjects, but he thrived only when he became involved in the customary exchanges with Lord Foulkes. Mr Swinney confirmed the impression that the British-Irish Council is a sound institution that should be the subject of a workmanlike business agenda and hard, useful, but probably more often than not thankless effort.

My colleague Ted Brocklebank gave a concise lesson on the history that underpins the potential long-term advantage of the British-Irish Council and talked about economic and tourism relationships, which are of far greater relative importance than many people imagine. Jamie Stone reflected on the wonder of the daily relationships between the UK and Ireland, drawing on a relevant personal experience. I congratulate Aileen Campbell, who was the first member to speak to the debate's subject. She described the importance of dialogue and the challenges that changing demographics present.

I simultaneously agreed with and was at odds with Hugh Henry. I agreed with almost all of what he said, but it struck me that his and many other speeches belonged to a debate to welcome the changes in Ireland since the Good Friday agreement rather than to a debate on the detail of last month's British-Irish Council meeting. A debate on the former subject would have been worth while; I query the need to devote an afternoon to the latter. When the Deputy Presiding Officer was in the chair he regularly questioned whether we were straying far from the issue in hand.

David Whitton brought us back to the subject with an interesting speech about work on social inclusion. David McLetchie spoke effectively on the working partnerships between this Parliament and other institutions. Keith Brown referred to Lady Thatcher—who, of course, led him personally to victory in the Falklands conflict in an act of leadership for which he and the country will be eternally grateful—by way of an attack on the members who support the amendment, whom he accused of being divisive. That was an example of the pot calling the kettle black. As many members were at pains to point out, the nature of the Government's motion begat the amendment, not the other way round. However, that was nothing

compared with members' astonishment at Mr Brown's apparent willingness to see many Scottish savers' money lost in Iceland, given his ill-judged attack on the UK Government's efforts to assure those savings.

We must all be encouraged that the British-Irish Council is flourishing. Through discussion, significant co-operation has been achieved and the model will undoubtedly lead to material progress. We support the forum and the Scottish Government's enthusiastic engagement with it, subject to the Government's always acting within the limits of its devolved powers and appreciating its collective responsibility as part of the United Kingdom.

16:43

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab): On the day when the Good Friday agreement was signed, Prime Minister Tony Blair called it a triumph of courage and the Taoiseach Bertie Ahern said that it drew a line under a "bloody past". I agree with the member who opened the debate for the Conservatives that many other people should be credited for their role in bringing about that historic achievement, in particular Peter Brooke. Two years of peace talks and 36 hours of intense last-minute negotiations resulted in an accord that was subsequently endorsed in referendums in the north and the south. That was a remarkable achievement for the Irish people as a whole. As we know, it has been far from plain sailing since then. The Northern Ireland Assembly has been suspended four times since its establishment. Nonetheless, the achievement was remarkable.

I mention the historical context because we should not forget that a main purpose of the British-Irish Council is to promote the harmonious and mutually beneficial development of the relationships of the people of the islands.

Margo MacDonald suggested that a name change to the council of the isles was perhaps due. I do not disagree, and she will find that other members believe that that would be a modern name change. However, the other MacDonald to my left tells me that the council of the isles was the council that existed to advise MacDonald, lord of the isles, in the days before the Scottish Crown and the Scottish Parliament. Perhaps there is a MacDonald interest in a name change.

Most of us who followed the history of Ireland, as politicians or observers or because we had a close connection with the place, never imagined that peace and stability was possible—Jamie Stone spoke about that at length. The suffering of the Irish communities through the years cannot be undone, but we can try to live up to our

responsibilities to sustain that stability and to nurture social and economic progress. Hugh Henry spoke very well on that subject. A commitment to the British-Irish Council is a central duty of the Scottish Government, on behalf of the Scottish people, to ensure that those objectives are fulfilled while allowing us to be part of an agreement and institution that can benefit Scotland and our society generally.

Let me touch on the Irish issue that has been debated this afternoon. The SNP has repeatedly held up Ireland as an economic model to support independence. It is therefore churlish to say that we are being insulting when we analyse that argument. Ireland is a successful country and economy, but let us analyse some of the differences between Scotland and Ireland. For example, it has a different approach to public services, and I do not believe that people in Scotland would support the Irish model of the lack of a national health service and paying for fire and refuse services. It is legitimate to have that debate without the suggestion that we are somehow throwing an insult. There are lessons that we can learn from the Irish Government, as we did on the proceeds of crime legislation. It was bold in passing that, and we followed its lead.

The cabinet secretary has outlined some important issues that the forum has discussed: the environment, the knowledge economy, digital inclusion and many others. Margo MacDonald rightly suggested that policing might be an issue for future discussion.

The parallel statement in the Northern Ireland Assembly on 21 October recorded that the First Minister, Alex Salmond, had offered Scotland as the lead in the council on the issue of energy because it is of mutual interest. As Lewis MacDonald outlined, Labour's concerns about the Scottish Government's approach lie behind our amendment. We believe that we must be part of the process of the British-Irish Council, and there should not be an attempt to bounce the council members into anything. The Liberal Democrats misunderstand our position. The amendment would not prevent Scotland from taking the lead on energy, policing or anything else, but those are matters for the council to decide.

SNP members claim that they do not understand the point of the Labour amendment, but surely they understand that consensus must be reached within the structures of the British-Irish Council and not by self-declaration in a vote of the Scottish Parliament tonight. Brian Adam accused the Labour Party of taking a party political approach—as if his party was not. The question whether Scotland takes the lead on any issue must be a matter for the council itself. I welcome David McLetchie's contribution on that point. He also

gave us food for thought by suggesting that there are some intergovernmental issues at home to sort out, perhaps including forums for MSPs and MPs to get together. He was clearly thinking out of the box.

Let me mention some of the more negative contributions. Jamie Hepburn accused the new Secretary of State for Scotland of insulting Ireland, but it appears to be okay for the member to insult the Scottish people by suggesting that the vast majority who do not support independence live in a stateless nation and that independence is somehow equated with normality. I call that an insult. Keith Brown accused the UK of bullying Iceland when in reality Britain was protecting the interests of Scottish bankers and investors.

There have been some good speeches, although some drifted off topic. Jackson Carlaw gave a good summary, while Aileen Campbell talked about working together. David Whitton spoke well, and Charlie Gordon, who speaks on transport more than anyone I know, made an important case. Margo MacDonald spoke about equality, and Peter Peacock's intervention on minority languages was important.

There are many issues that we can all agree are worthy subjects for the British-Irish Council and, as others have raised their interests, I will raise one of my own. Members will know that I have been interested for some time in how Scotland can explore a model for music enterprise. The Welsh have created the Welsh Music Foundation, which has proven to be of great advantage to the Welsh economy. We should not miss that trick. Northern Ireland has the Northern Ireland Music Industry Commission, which was established in 2001 and has

"a remit to provide strategy and services towards accelerating the development of a sustainable music industry in Northern Ireland."

I am pleased that the Minister for Europe, External Affairs and Culture, Linda Fabiani, has joined us for the debate and that she is listening to this point, because Scotland could do better on the music business. Although we rightly prioritise many other issues over music, I have always believed that it is in Scotland's business interest to nurture its own musical talent at home. The Welsh Music Foundation and the Northern Ireland Music Industry Commission provide two important models, and we could use the British-Irish Council to exchange information to find out whether the Welsh and Northern Irish are doing it better.

At some time—I hope that it will be soon—we will get to discuss the role of creative Scotland in relation to the music business. I raise my concerns about whether it is the right place for music, but I urge ministers to think about it. Members who follow the music market know that the US's world

domination of it must be challenged. At one point in the 1980s, our share of the market was as high as 32 per cent, but it is now a staggering 0.2 per cent, so there is a lot of work to be done.

The British-Irish Council should be a forum for discussing many important issues, and rightly so. There is still some common ground in the Parliament, but there are clearly some differences. I ask members to support the Labour amendment.

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): I call the cabinet secretary to wind up what has clearly been a wide-ranging debate.

16:51

John Swinney: I will consider that comment to have given me fruitful licence for my closing speech. I will try to put some life into the debate, as Mr Carlaw has been disappointed by the lack of it.

Notwithstanding some of the comments that I will make, we have heard some fine speeches. Hugh Henry cited the roots of the British-Irish Council and Jamie Stone commented on his family connections in the county of Armagh in the north of Ireland. Mr McLetchie made some fair points about the roots of the peace process, which was created through the courageous work of the Conservative Governments in the 1980s and early 1990s and was reinforced by the work of the former Prime Minister, Tony Blair, and the former Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern. That work has created conditions that, as Jamie Stone said, it would have been incredible to imagine would come about in such a short time.

There is a genuine point of celebration about the British-Irish Council. We should all be profoundly grateful for its contribution to peace and stability in these islands. My colleagues Jamie Hepburn and Aileen Campbell presented a different and additional perspective on that, from their involvement when younger in debates between young people from many political movements in these islands. Those young people were able to find common ground in the private and informal discussions that many organisations brought about to try to ensure that progress was made.

I will address some specific points that have been made. Hugh Henry asked about the creation of a secretariat for the British-Irish Council. I confirm that the council is considering that and that we have repeated the previous Administration's offer to provide a permanent home and the necessary physical support for a secretariat.

Peter Peacock asked me about the role of minority languages. Wales is already leading a work stream on minority languages, and I will

ensure that the points that he made are communicated to our colleagues in the Welsh Assembly Government.

Mr Whitton asked about social inclusion. Work is on-going, the early part of which focused predominantly on the position of lone parents. A report was presented to a ministerial meeting in May 2008. Subsequently, the council agreed that social inclusion work should focus on the role of voluntary and community organisations in promoting social inclusion in our respective countries. Further reports will be made to the council in due course.

In trying to explain the position that the Conservatives intended to adopt in the debate, Mr McLetchie made an interesting observation that gave us some insight into the difference of opinion between the Government and the Conservative party on some questions. If I understood him correctly, he said, in effect, that before we debate matters in the British-Irish Council, we should agree a position within the United Kingdom. That betrays a certain naivety about the nature of the relationship between the United Kingdom Government and the devolved Administrations as a whole—I do not single out the Scottish Government in that respect. There are issues on which the opinions of the devolved Administrations differ from those of the United Kingdom Government. My experience suggests that on issues of financial management and control, the Treasury view prevails, no matter what arguments we marshal from evidence-based information from documents of some standing, such as the statement of funding policy. I caution Mr McLetchie against taking the view that we need simply to toe the UK line, as there are issues on which we need to protect and promote the distinctive Scottish interest.

The fault line in today's debate is the question of energy. I point out to members that the contents of the Government's motion are simply a statement of fact. The motion invites Parliament to support a Government aspiration—

"the Scottish ministers' proposal to lead a workstream on renewable energy".

Sometimes the Government is criticised for not coming to Parliament to seek consent. On this occasion, we have come to Parliament to seek consent and have been criticised for doing so. Some people need to straighten out their arguments.

On that point I cite Lord Foulkes, who told me that the Government has done nothing to support biomass in Scotland. For heaven's sake! Lord Foulkes cannot have been spending much time in the Glenrothes parliamentary constituency—*[Interruption.]* I am told that he has been away. If

he had been around, he would have known that, some time ago, the Government announced investment in a biomass facility at the Tullis Russell plant, into which the company has injected private capital. If Lord Foulkes is so ignorant on such questions, who on earth is connected to the people of Fife?

George Foulkes: Will the cabinet secretary give that information to his colleague Jim Mather? In parliamentary question S3W-9886, I asked how many energy generation schemes had been approved since May 2007. In his answer, dated 6 March 2008, Jim Mather indicated that there was one for wave, nil for tidal, nil for offshore wind and nil for biomass. That sounds like a Hearts score, but it is not.

John Swinney: The only part of the intervention with which I agree is Lord Foulkes's comment about the Hearts score.

Mr Frank McAveety (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab): You jambos need to stick together.

John Swinney: None of us is talking about football in Parliament today, Mr McAveety.

Mr McAveety: It was not me.

John Swinney: Maybe aye, maybe no.

The Government has come to Parliament to seek consent on the energy question.

My final point relates to the economy. Lord Foulkes asked why on earth we are debating the British-Irish Council this afternoon. I am not terribly clued up on the reasons for that, but the four wise men of Parliament—Messrs Crawford, McLetchie, Rumbles and McMahon—must have agreed to it inadvertently at some moment in the past.

Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): As the cabinet secretary must know, we agreed to a Government proposal.

John Swinney: The proposal was agreed to enthusiastically by the four wise men.

I simply point out that I injected into today's debate a report on the debate on the international financial situation that the First Minister initiated at the British-Irish Council. Today's debate has therefore given me the opportunity to update the Parliament on the economic situation. However, we will bring forward, in Government time, an appropriate debate on that subject to ensure that Parliament has the opportunity to discuss those fundamental issues that affect our citizens.

Business Motions

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S3M-2781, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a revised business programme for Thursday 30 October, which is tomorrow.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees the following revision to the programme of business for Thursday 30 October 2008—

after

2.15 pm Themed Question Time
Europe, External Affairs and Culture;
Education and Lifelong Learning

delete

2.55 pm Scottish Government Debate: Non-
Native Invasive Species

and insert

2.55 pm Ministerial Statement: Teacher
Employment Working Group Report

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Non-
Native Invasive Species—[Bruce
Crawford.]

The Presiding Officer: Mike Rumbles has indicated that he wishes to speak against the motion. Mr Rumbles, you have up to five minutes.

17:01

Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): At the end of last week, the Government asked the Opposition business managers for their views on its intention to make a statement today on the teacher employment working group report. The Opposition parties asked the Government to schedule the statement for next week rather than this week, to allow MSPs time to prepare. At meetings yesterday, Opposition parties again made it clear to the Government that, as the statement was not an emergency statement, it could and should be made next week rather than this week.

At the formal meeting of the Parliamentary Bureau yesterday, the Government insisted that it wished to make the statement this week but agreed to move it by just one day. The Government would not accede to the reasonable requests of the Opposition parties to move the statement to next week. As will be made clear when the vote is published, the Conservative party in the bureau moved to support the Government in a formal vote, in which the proposal was passed by 63 weighted votes to 62.

This minority Government makes a pretence of consultation and discussion, but in the Parliamentary Bureau it simply demands that it get its own way over the parliamentary timetable. That is not good enough. I hear howls of protest from SNP back benchers, but they really need to know what their business manager is doing. I urge the Government to reconsider its increasingly macho approach to the way in which it does business. It is not helpful to have to bring issues such as this to the floor of the chamber. The parliamentary timetabling of non-urgent ministerial statements should surely be decided by reasonable agreement between the parties. Let us not forget that Parliament, rather than the Government, is supposed to be in charge of parliamentary business. That is why we have an opportunity to vote on the issue in a few minutes' time. Such votes do not happen in the House of Commons; they happen here because we are clear that Parliament is in charge, not the Government.

I have no doubt that the Government will repeat its view that it is simply responding to a previous parliamentary resolution that it should make a statement "as soon as practicable". Tomorrow is certainly soon but, for practical purposes, the statement would be better made next week. The Government's argument simply does not hold. Therefore, there must be another reason—so far unmentioned—why the Government is so desperate to make what we are told is a non-urgent statement this week rather than next week.

This is no way to conduct our parliamentary affairs. I urge Parliament to regain control of its timetable by taking the opportunity to vote against the business motion.

The Presiding Officer: I call on Bruce Crawford to respond on behalf of the Government.

17:04

The Minister for Parliamentary Business (Bruce Crawford): On 11 September, following a debate on teacher numbers, Parliament resolved to call on

"the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning to make a ministerial statement on this subject as soon as practicable following receipt of the report of the Teacher Employment Working Group."

In response to that resolution, I recommended to the Parliamentary Bureau yesterday that we programme a statement for this week, which is evidently the soonest and most practicable time to do so. Initially, I suggested that the statement should be scheduled for today. Having listened to the concerns of business managers about the need to provide more time for MSPs to consult on this important matter, I suggested a compromise by recommending to the Parliamentary Bureau

that the statement be scheduled for tomorrow afternoon, immediately following themed question time.

However, I put parliamentary concerns to one side and agree for a moment with Mike Rumbles that there is another reason why we are doing this, and it is much more important than he suggested. An important task will flow from the teacher employment working group's report. It will be to do with better-integrated national and local teacher workforce planning. The teacher workforce planning cycle has commenced and putting back publication of the report would delay efforts to achieve that integration and do the workforce planning that we all want to do. The sooner the report is published, the sooner we can get its recommendations and get on with the job.

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

Bruce Crawford: Presiding Officer, are interventions appropriate in this situation?

The Presiding Officer: Yes, they are.

Michael McMahon: I thank Bruce Crawford for that information, but I ask him why, if it is so important, he did not make it available to the bureau yesterday? Rather than Mr Crawford clarifying the situation, he has introduced something else into it, which makes us even more suspicious of the motivation behind the arrangement.

Bruce Crawford: I did not need to do that because David McLetchie did a good job of making that very point at the bureau meeting yesterday.

Although we hope that Parliament will support the recommendation to have the ministerial statement this week, any requests for another debate at an appropriate time will be treated sympathetically.

I expect Rhona Brankin to be particularly supportive of the Government's position when we make a decision. After all, in her contribution to the debate on 11 September, she argued forcibly that the Government should make a ministerial statement on the matter before the October recess. Indeed, she felt so strongly about the matter that it was included in her motion for debate. I apologise to Rhona Brankin for not being in a position to deliver the statement before the recess. Perhaps she will accept that the Government has done the next best thing by providing Parliament with the opportunity to question the cabinet secretary during the week following the recess. I therefore commend the motion to Parliament. As Mike Rumbles said,

Parliament will have the final say and I will rest with its decision.

The Presiding Officer: The question is, that motion S3M-2781, in the name of Bruce Crawford, 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)
 McGregor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)

Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

AGAINST

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (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)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (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)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

ABSTENTIONS

MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 65, Against 45, Abstentions 1.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees the following revision to the programme of business for Thursday 30 October 2008—

after

2.15 pm Themed Question Time
 Europe, External Affairs and Culture;
 Education and Lifelong Learning

delete

2.55 pm Scottish Government Debate: Non-Native Invasive Species

and insert

2.55 pm Ministerial Statement: Teacher Employment Working Group Report

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Non-Native Invasive Species

The Presiding Officer: The next item of business is consideration of business motion S3M-2784, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees the following programme of business—

Wednesday 5 November 2008

2.30 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Stage 1 Debate: Damages (Asbestos-related Conditions) (Scotland) Bill

followed by Business Motion

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 6 November 2008

9.15 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Ministerial Statement: Scrutiny Improvement Changes to Structures

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Patients' Rights

11.40 am General Question Time

12 noon First Minister's Question Time

2.15 pm Themed Question Time
 Health and Wellbeing

2.55 pm Scottish Government Debate: United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 12 November 2008

2.30 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Stage 1 Debate: Scottish Parliamentary Pensions Bill

followed by Financial Resolution: Scottish Parliamentary Pensions Bill

followed by Business Motion

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business
 Thursday 13 November 2008
 9.15 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions
followed by Scottish Government Business
 11.40 am General Question Time
 12 noon First Minister's Question Time
 2.15 pm Themed Question Time
 Rural Affairs and the Environment;
 Justice and Law Officers
 2.55 pm Scottish Government Business
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business—[Bruce Crawford.]

Motion agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next item of business is consideration of business motion S3M-2782, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a stage 1 timetable for the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Bill.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Bill at Stage 1 be completed by 6 March 2009.—[Bruce Crawford.]

Motion agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motion

17:09

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): The next item of business is consideration of a Parliamentary Bureau motion. I invite Bruce Crawford to move motion S3M-2783, on the approval of a Scottish statutory instrument.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Mental Health (England and Wales Cross-border transfer: patients subject to requirements other than detention) (Scotland) Regulations 2008 be approved.—[Bruce Crawford.]

The Presiding Officer: The question on the motion will be put at decision time.

Decision Time

17:09

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson):

There are three questions to be put as a result of today's business.

The first question is, that amendment S3M-2767.1, in the name of Michael McMahon, which seeks to amend motion S3M-2767, in the name of John Swinney, on the British-Irish Council, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

AGAINST

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Ahmad, Bashir (Glasgow) (SNP)

Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 46, Against 65, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S3M-2767, in the name of John Swinney, on the British-Irish Council, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Ahmad, Bashir (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)

Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

AGAINST

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (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)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

ABSTENTIONS

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 65, Against 30, Abstentions 16.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament acknowledges the successful summit meeting of the British-Irish Council at Hopetoun House; notes the outcomes of the summit in relation to demography, energy and the ongoing business of the Council; notes also that the Council gave consideration to the global economic situation; believes that the Council is an invaluable forum for strengthening intergovernmental relationships; supports the Scottish ministers' proposal to lead a workstream on renewable energy, and encourages them to continue to support the Council in addressing issues of real and common concern.

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S3M-2783, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on the approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Mental Health (England and Wales Cross-border transfer: patients subject to requirements other than detention) (Scotland) Regulations 2008 be approved.

Co-operative Development Scotland

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S3M-1926, in the name of Elaine Murray, on the success of the first year of Co-operative Development Scotland. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament welcomes the success of Co-operative Development Scotland in promoting and facilitating the development of co-operative enterprises across Scotland since it became fully operational in April 2007; notes that research carried out by Heriot-Watt University in 2006 estimated the combined annual turnover of co-operatives and mutuals in Scotland to be around £4 billion; believes that the contribution of this sector to the Scottish economy nationally and to local urban and rural economies, such as that of Dumfries and Galloway, could be increased, and believes that government funding for Co-operative Development Scotland should be extended beyond March 2009.

17:13

Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab): When I asked the Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism about the future funding of Co-operative Development Scotland on 9 October, he advised the chamber that an evaluation was under way and was likely to be completed by the end of December, and that future funding would be

"an operational matter for Scottish Enterprise."—[*Official Report*, 9 October 2008; c 11712.]

Given the Scottish Government's statements of support for the third sector, which are echoed by all political parties, I hope that ministers will proactively encourage Scottish Enterprise to continue to fund CDS after March next year. If the evaluation is not finished until the end of this year and Scottish Enterprise must then take on board the results of the evaluation when it decides whether to continue to provide funding for the organisation, the period between the decision being made and funding possibly running out will be very short.

The setting up of CDS was positively encouraged by the previous Scottish Executive, and CDS was launched in September 2006 to promote the development of co-operative enterprises in Scotland, with a budget of £3 million. Its purpose was to provide advice on business development, to help with the start-up of co-operatives and employee-owned businesses, to advise on business ownership transfer, to commission research and to promote the co-operative sector.

With an estimated combined turnover of £4 billion, which represents about 4.25 per cent of Scottish gross domestic product, co-operatives and mutuals contribute impressively to the Scottish economy, and involve a surprisingly high proportion of the population: 20 per cent of the adult population are members of a co-operative and 25 per cent are members of a mutual. Co-operatives include housing associations, retailers, agricultural and fishing enterprises, credit unions and football supporters trusts.

As well as providing advice and helping new co-operatives, CDS plays a valuable role in promoting success stories that demonstrate just how enterprising this part of the third sector can be. Examples of successes include Stewartry Care, which is the largest independent care provider in Dumfries and Galloway. Established in 1993, Stewartry Care transferred to employee ownership in 2004, with the assistance of the Baxi Partnership trust. The company now employs 170 people and looks after more than 500 people across the region. In its first year of operation as an employee-owned company, turnover increased by 16 per cent, and profitability increased by 39 per cent. In a sector where wages are traditionally low, Stewartry Care offers the highest rates of pay in the region and can offer its workforce flexible working and good-quality training.

Scotmid, one of Scotland's largest co-operatives, was in the enviable position last month of announcing an increase in its operating profit from £2.8 million for the same period in the previous year to £4.5 million. Many private retail chains must be envious of such a high percentage increase during these difficult times. Scotmid is far from being a new enterprise, of course. Its origins can be traced back to the opening of the St. Cuthbert's Co-operative Society in Edinburgh in 1859. It was the major supermarket retail outlet when I was growing up in Edinburgh—not in 1859, I should add. Now rebranded as the Scotmid Co-operative, it has 251 retail outlets and 4,200 staff and includes the Scotmid food retailer, Semi-Chem, and funeral and property services. It was also an active promoter of fair trade products before many of the other retailers saw the potential for ethically traded products. On that point, in my experience, it still offers a wider selection of fair trade wines than other retailers.

CDS is also actively encouraging agricultural co-operative enterprises, enabling producers to work together to achieve better prices and to add value to their products. First Milk, which is headquartered in Paisley, is the United Kingdom's largest dairy farmers co-operative, involving 3,400 farmers and producing 16 per cent of the UK's milk. Two years ago, First Milk purchased Dairy Crest's retail cheese brand and is now the largest

UK-based cheese supplier, with direct relationships with all the major supermarkets.

Housing associations are increasingly important providers of social rented housing. Stock transfer from local authorities, as happened in Dumfries and Galloway, has increased the proportion of properties in the ownership of housing associations. Many other housing associations have grown up over the years from small beginnings, such as Loreburn Housing Association, which was originally set up to address housing shortages, especially for vulnerable people, in the town of Dumfries, but now owns and manages 1,700 properties across the region. Similarly, Key Housing Association provides housing for people with learning disabilities and offers support to others who are not in their accommodation. It was set up 25 years ago in response to the concerns of parents of learning disabled adults.

We must not forget the contribution that football supporters trusts have made to the game in Scotland. There are 35 supporters clubs at all levels of football, with over 30,000 member fans. Nor must we forget the success of the credit union network, which we discussed a lot around the time of the Farepak incident, as credit unions offer people a way of saving small sums of money safely. These days, that is an important consideration with regard to how we lend and borrow money.

CDS and Co-operatives UK have been successful in attracting the general assembly of the International Co-operative Alliance to Glasgow at the end of September next year. That organisation represents co-operatives across the globe and has 224 member organisations from 87 countries, which—amazingly—represent more than 800 million people worldwide. The event will generate something in the region of £2 million for the Scottish economy through delegate expenditure during the year of homecoming 2009, and is very much in the spirit of that year.

The co-operative and mutual model clearly works—it has done since the days of St Cuthbert's Co-op. It provides an alternative to private or state ownership, one in which each employee or individual small shareholder has an equal interest and involvement. It is a model that might offer much during these troubled financial times, and I urge ministers to take a hands-on approach to ensuring that Co-operative Development Scotland is still with us in six months' time.

17:19

Gavin Brown (Lothians) (Con): I congratulate Elaine Murray on securing the debate. She rightly highlighted the important contribution of co-

operatives to the fabric of life in Scotland. It is worth repeating some of the statistics on the contribution of co-ops to the economy. There are more than 400 co-ops in Scotland, employing more than 22,000 people, with a turnover of about £4 billion. To put that into perspective, it is about the same turnover as that of the entire tourism industry in Scotland. It is a pretty sizeable chunk and, as Elaine Murray stated, it is about 4.25 per cent of Scottish GDP.

Elaine Murray neatly outlined the range of companies in Scotland that are co-operatives, from household names down to micro-businesses. Household names include John Lewis, Dunfermline Building Society, Loch Fyne Oysters and the Scottish Association of Farmers Markets. A particularly strong example in the Lothians is the Edinburgh Bicycle Co-operative. It started in 1977 as a small bicycle repair shop, employing three people. It now has branches in Edinburgh, Aberdeen, Newcastle and Leeds, a payroll of more than 70 and an online shop. Most important is the ethos in that organisation. Every full-time worker becomes an equal member after a probationary period of one year. He or she becomes an equal owner of the business, entitled for instance to an equal share of the annual profits.

There is no debate to be had about the contribution of co-ops to Scottish life. Where there is a debate to be had is in looking more closely at Co-operative Development Scotland. There are two important points to consider for the future funding of CDS. First, what has it achieved so far? Secondly—and probably more important—what is it likely to achieve in future? So far, there has been some pretty good stuff. Without question, it has raised the profile of co-operatives. If we consider the number of column inches that have been achieved, or what is described as equivalent media spend, the figures are impressive. CDS has started and developed businesses, and improved the research into co-operatives. The previous figures were hazy, and there is still a lot more research to be done on co-operatives.

CDS has an advisory board of considerable experience and it has the potential to offer a truly niche service, particularly in looking at the management, legal and tax implications of having a co-operative as opposed to another type of business.

Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I am sure that the member will be glad to know that as the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee has approved the cross-party group on co-operatives in the Parliament, many more people can become involved in investigating how well the processes that he has just described will be taken forward and made more efficient.

Gavin Brown: That is positive news, and I look forward to seeing how the cross-party group develops over time.

There are areas in which I would like to see improvement. As of March this year, the number of start-ups since CDS began is 27, only five of which are in rural areas. That needs improvement. CDS needs to find ways of working better with the business gateway centrally, and with local authorities running business gateways, to push up that number. There are only five high-growth client co-operatives. Only one growth business has shown improved business performance since CDS was established. The number of employee management buyouts is zero. Some of the results have been impressive, but some areas need improvement so that the organisation makes the impact that it ought to make to take this area forward. Co-ops are a key fixture in the economy. CDS has done some useful work, but there are areas in which performance could be stronger.

17:24

Jim Hume (South of Scotland) (LD): I congratulate Elaine Murray on securing the debate. Rob Gibson has mentioned the establishment of the cross-party group on co-operatives, which I will co-convene. We must recognise the work of Willie Coffey MSP in instigating the group.

Benefits are to be gained from a group of individuals owning and running their own organisation. The concept of mutual ownership is relevant now, given the extremely difficult economics that we are facing. A recent report that was presented to the European Association of Co-operative Banks stated:

“co-operative banks in Europe should be seen as a safe haven in these times of turbulence and uncertainty in the financial markets.”

Co-operatives come in many forms and provide all manner of products and services. They are involved in agriculture, social housing, retail and many other areas. They are built on the common theme of their funding principles and the idea that their members have a relationship with the enterprise as producers or consumers of its products, or as employees.

The co-operative idea as we know it is not new but dates back as far as the 18th century. We are all familiar with the Fenwick Weavers Society, and Robert Owen from New Lanark in the south of Scotland is widely regarded as the founder of the co-operative movement. His work at the New Lanark cotton mills was underpinned by the principle that workers should have fair working conditions and by the idea that welfare and education rights should be extended to workers’

families. He was many years ahead of his time. Members might have read my motion S3M-2755, on the New Lanark world heritage site. The motion already has some cross-party support, but I hope that more members will support it because the site has some funding issues.

There are of course other, more modern co-operative movements and projects in the south of Scotland region. Elaine Murray mentioned how important Scottish Enterprise has been in helping such projects. The Borders Machinery Ring was established in the 1980s to rationalise labour, machinery and input costs. It has grown since then and now offers a range of services that help to sustain and improve business viability, including accountancy services, training, waste management and the bulk buying of fuel. It is even running a project on renewable energy.

Elaine Murray mentioned Stewartry Care, which provides long-term residential care for older and disabled people. It now employs more than 150 people and looks after more than 500 clients throughout Dumfries and Galloway. It states:

"The co-operative approach has enabled us to provide a quality personal service that is driven by a happy, positive, motivated and highly skilled workforce".

Scottish Enterprise has also helped the Borders Foundation for Rural Sustainability, in which I declare an interest as a past chairman. The foundation has brainstormed interests and opportunities to forge co-operative diversification projects, some of which turned into real businesses or venture groups, including Clifftop Discovery Ltd in Coldingham, which provides wildlife tours, and the James Hutton trail in Berwickshire. Other examples include East Lothian Potatoes, Wigtownshire Quality Lamb Ltd, Irvine North Credit Union and the Scottish Cashmere Club, which represents textiles companies from the Borders to Ayrshire. The list goes on.

In addition, we have organisations such as the Scottish Agricultural Organisation Society, which plays a key role in developing the work of those businesses and groups. However, we need sustained funding in place to help and support SAOS and its new ventures. Again, SAOS has been helped by Scottish Enterprise in the past.

Co-operative Development Scotland undoubtedly has a role to play in providing resources to enable and encourage the take-up of the co-operative option and improve the growth of individual co-operatives. However, that work should be done in conjunction—or should I say co-operation?—with agencies such as SAOS, Co-operation and Mutuality Scotland, BFRS, BMR, Scottish Enterprise and the business gateway, which already have the required knowledge and experience.

17:28

Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab): I thank Elaine Murray for bringing the matter to the chamber for debate this evening. I draw members' attention to my entry in the register of members' interests and to the fact that I am a member of the Co-operative Party.

I have been interested in co-operatives all my adult life because I believe that it is important in our lives to have the opportunity to create a different business model from the one that has been more widely known among members of the public. The co-operative model gives us the opportunity to provide almost sheltered employment. I am sure that the importance of that is not lost on the minister, Jim Mather. We must encourage people who are not used to being in business to learn business skills.

There is one reason why we should celebrate tonight. I listened carefully to what Elaine Murray said about the funding issue, but I get a sense from what the minister and other colleagues in the Parliament have said previously that we are pushing at an open door with regard to funding.

I hope that the minister will bring us good news in due course, because there is such strong cross-party support for the notion of co-operatives. Interest in the issue is genuine—it is not born of political opportunism; every member has, at one time or another, expressed support for co-operatives. That is why I was keen to become a member of the proposed cross-party group on co-ops and to promote my colleague James Kelly as one of the group's co-conveners. We have a tremendous amount to learn about co-ops, although we already know a tremendous amount about them. We know about the transformation that Mondragón brought about for people in Spain; we also know about what has happened throughout the world.

As I said, I have been interested in co-operatives all my adult life. I was a co-founder member of the Kennington cleaners co-op in London and a founder member of a nursery co-op called Gumboots, which was named after my trade union at the time, the GMB, because it put so many resources and so much energy into the project. I was also a founder member of the Partnership in Childcare co-operative, which was established where I live in Dalgety Bay, and a variety of other co-operatives.

I am conscious that dealing with officialdom, whether in local authorities or in central Government, can sometimes feel like pushing a double-decker bus uphill, because officials still have a strong resistance to the notion of funding co-operatives, although a workers co-op tends not to meet the same resistance as a community co-

op does. Community co-ops are important because they are about empowering people to shape a business in their locality. They are subject to the same disciplines as other businesses—they have to produce business plans, for example, and deal with the banking. Community businesses are important, but I recognise that there are many business models across the range of co-operatives.

I promised my colleagues that I would speak for only a short time, but I will make one final, brief comment before I close. Reference has been made to credit unions and the importance of banking in the economic crisis. If the Parliament were to have a major thrust on credit unions and put them at the top of our agenda, we would do Scotland a power of good.

I wish the minister, my colleagues and everyone well with co-ops, because they are tremendously important for us all.

17:32

The Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism (Jim Mather): I congratulate my colleague Elaine Murray on securing the debate and I thank everyone who has spoken. There have been many interesting and supportive comments.

I am pleased to have the opportunity to convey the Scottish Government's recognition of the importance of co-operative enterprises and mutuals in contributing to the growth of our economy, providing jobs, creating and retaining wealth throughout Scotland and bringing a wide range of social benefits to our communities over the years.

I will go straight to the point that Elaine Murray made in her speech, which she has also raised in questions. There is considerable proactive ministerial interest in and attention to the co-operative model, which is driven by the contribution that she has made and by the fact that the model has considerable mileage in it. The debate comes at an interesting time. As Helen Eadie said, the co-operative model is a different business model but, with CDS, positive results are now coming through. An open, constructive and transparent process is under way and will feed back in many ways into the report card that Gavin Brown mentioned. It will reflect the raised profile of co-operatives, the pipeline that has been put in place and the sector's propensity to broadcast what has worked and what might work better in the future.

Much of what is happening today in Scotland dates back a long time. Co-operatives go back to the 18th century. Jim Hume mentioned the Fenwick Weavers Society, which we debated earlier in the year, and New Lanark. That is a

fantastic heritage and a great pedigree, but the key point is that that heritage and pedigree are being revisited and consolidated in successful countries, successful organisations and now successful companies across the globe.

Companies that have gone only for managing by results, growing bigger and bigger, and getting bigger market shares, turnovers and share values have sometimes grown too big for their food chain to support them. Essentially, the co-operative model is much more about managing by altruistic, responsible and moral means, looking to exceed customer requirements, building customer dependence, playing an honourable and positive role with suppliers, treating employees positively, playing a significant part in building the strength of communities and other economic developments, and cross-contaminating. There is a lot of mileage in that model.

I was taken by Helen Eadie's confidence in me and in CDS's future. That confidence is exceedingly unlikely to be misplaced.

We have a co-operative sector that we can be proud of. It is a thriving community. Researchers at Heriot-Watt University recently produced helpful data on the sector, which show that there are now more than 430 commercial co-owned co-operatives and mutuals in Scotland, which have an annual turnover of some £4 billion. The sector is therefore significant and rooted in place. The businesses in question employ 22,000 people and account for 4.25 per cent of gross domestic product in Scotland across sectors, as other members have mentioned. I like the figure of 4.25 per cent, because it was 4 per cent for a long time. As I said, we have a sector that we can be proud of.

CDS now has a track record; it has had its first year of experience. On a standard deviation curve, this is the start of the bell curve—things could really move and take off. The current climate is exceedingly positive; it creates real opportunities for the co-operative movement across Scotland. The movement has the ability to contribute to the achievement of every single one of the aims that we placed on our agenda when we came into government: it can contribute to the creation of a wealthier, fairer, healthier, smarter, safer and greener Scotland.

On the creation of a wealthier and fairer Scotland, the movement creates and retains value locally. We are currently running a programme in Argyll and Bute that builds on the experience of Loch Fyne Oysters. We want to get more of our sectors talking to one another. In fact, on Friday, we are running an event with the health care sector for which we have brought in other organisations, including organisations in the third sector. We are seeking to find out how we can

help the health care sector get better clinical outcomes and better value and cut its costs while keeping the Argyll and Bute pound in Argyll and Bute. If the co-operative movement does anything, it provides a real contribution towards keeping the local pound local.

In light of what we have heard and CDS's first year of experience, I look forward with confidence to the results of the review. I have given a commitment that the review will be open, constructive and transparent, and I look forward to engaging with it with all the attention and interest that Elaine Murray eloquently suggested I should have.

Meeting closed at 17:38.

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