

# **MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT**

Wednesday 25 February 2009

Session 3

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# CONTENTS

Wednesday 25 February 2009

SCOTTISH MINISTERS AND LAW OFFICERS  
PRESIDING OFFICERS  
SCOTTISH PARLIAMENTARY CORPORATE BODY  
PARLIAMENTARY BUREAU  
COMMITTEE CONVENERS AND DEPUTY CONVENERS

## Debates

Col.

<b>TIME FOR REFLECTION</b> .....	15119
<b>UNPAID CARERS</b> .....	15121
<i>Motion moved—[Margaret Mitchell].</i>	
Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con).....	15121
The Minister for Public Health and Sport (Shona Robison) .....	15124
Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab) .....	15126
Hugh O'Donnell (Central Scotland) (LD) .....	15128
Bill Kidd (Glasgow) (SNP) .....	15129
Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab) .....	15130
Elizabeth Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con) .....	15132
Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD) .....	15133
Christopher Harvie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP) .....	15135
Ross Finnie (West of Scotland) (LD) .....	15136
Cathy Jamieson (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab).....	15138
Shona Robison .....	15139
Marlyn Glen (North East Scotland) (Lab) .....	15141
<b>COMMUNITY POLICING</b> .....	15144
<i>Motion moved—[Bill Aitken].</i>	
Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con) .....	15144
The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill) .....	15148
Paul Martin (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab).....	15151
John Lamont (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con) .....	15153
Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD) .....	15155
Stuart McMillan (West of Scotland) (SNP) .....	15158
Cathie Craigie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab).....	15161
Andrew Welsh (Angus) (SNP) .....	15163
James Kelly (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab).....	15165
Michael Matheson (Falkirk West) (SNP) .....	15166
Mike Pringle (Edinburgh South) (LD) .....	15168
Jackson Carlaw (West of Scotland) (Con) .....	15171
Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab).....	15173
The Minister for Community Safety (Fergus Ewing).....	15175
Bill Butler (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab).....	15178
<b>BUSINESS MOTION</b> .....	15182
<i>Motion moved—[Michael McMahon]—and agreed to.</i>	
Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green) .....	15183
Brian Adam (Aberdeen North) (SNP) .....	15184
<b>PARLIAMENTARY BUREAU MOTION</b> .....	15185
<i>Motion moved—[Michael McMahon].</i>	
Iain Smith (North East Fife) (LD) .....	15185
Brian Adam (Aberdeen North) (SNP) .....	15186
<b>DECISION TIME</b> .....	15188
<b>SEABIRDS</b> .....	15191
<i>Motion debated—[Nanette Milne].</i>	
Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con).....	15191

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP) .....	15193
Peter Peacock (Highlands and Islands) (Lab).....	15195
Ted Brocklebank (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con) .....	15197
The Minister for Environment (Roseanna Cunningham) .....	15199

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### **Justice**

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25 February 2009

## Scottish Parliament

*Wednesday 25 February 2009*

[THE PRESIDING OFFICER *opened the meeting at 14:00*]

### 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 Father Noel Colford from Holy Cross, Brodick, on the Isle of Arran.

**Father Noel Colford (Holy Cross, Brodick, Isle of Arran):** We could begin this afternoon by pausing for a few moments in sympathy and respect for David Cameron and his wife Samantha on the loss of their son Ivan.

Barack Obama says that his mother was

“the most spiritually awakened person”

he has ever met. She had an “unswerving instinct for kindness” and an “abiding sense of wonder”. She was brought up without belief in God and her religious scepticism was reinforced by the Christians she encountered in her youth, especially the

“sanctimonious preachers who would dismiss three-quarters of the world’s people as ignorant heathens doomed to spend the afterlife in eternal damnation.”

Christians should acknowledge that there are passages in the New Testament that can lead to this kind of narrow-minded bigotry. Unfortunately, the great passage in the gospels that shows that this bigotry is against the mind of Christ is not often fully appreciated. The parable of the Good Samaritan is well known, but the point of the story is usually missed. The Jewish people were intensely hostile towards the Samaritans on religious and political grounds. The Samaritan is made the hero of the story to show that the people whom we may think of as our enemies may actually be better people than ourselves, and to teach us that to love our neighbour means not simply to care for him, but to respect him whatever his race, religion or political persuasion.

Appropriately enough, the only person whom I have heard explain the parable in this way is not a Christian but a Sikh: Indigit Singh, who recently pointed out that he himself could come under one dictionary’s definition of heathen.

The Scottish Government’s campaign against sectarianism is one that all Christians—and, indeed, everyone—should support. If the Scottish Parliament wishes the people of Scotland to treat

one another with respect, it should lead by example. The present political situation, in which parties have to co-operate, requires respect and compromise.

Barack Obama says that there was

“a golden age in Washington”

after world war two when, regardless of the party in power,

“civility reigned and government worked”

and when there was a trust and respect between politicians that helped them work through their differences and get things done. Respect for one another not only oils the wheels of government, it powers them—it gets things done.

## Unpaid Carers

**The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson):** The next item of business is a debate on motion S3M-3261, in the name of Margaret Mitchell, on behalf of the Equal Opportunities Committee, on unpaid carers. We have no time to spare in the debate and, therefore, members should stick to the times that they are allocated.

14:04

**Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con):** I am sure that members will wish to join me as I express on behalf of the Scottish Conservative party our sorrow and condolences to David and Samantha Cameron, who have tragically lost their son Ivan. Ivan was blessed with parents who loved and supported him, and dedicated national health service staff who nursed and cared for him. Our thoughts and prayers are with Ivan's family today.

Unpaid carers are affected by issues that are definitely to do with fairness. They are therefore affected by equal opportunities issues that cut across most, if not all, of the equality groups. This debate marks a departure from the norm, in that it is not about a committee inquiry report or a stage 1 report on a bill; rather, it results from two round-table discussions on unpaid carers that the Equal Opportunities held. Quite simply, having heard the evidence that was given, the committee wanted to bring the issues that were raised by various groups and organisations that represent unpaid carers and providers of services to those carers directly to the chamber and the Scottish Government.

To put the evidence in context, it is important to note that it is estimated that there are currently 660,000 unpaid carers in Scotland. It is a sobering thought that anyone can find themselves becoming a carer at any time. That fact was graphically brought to the public's attention only last week with a moving revelation from the Independent Television News presenter John Suchet. He described the full impact of his new role as carer to his wife Bonnie, who now suffers from dementia.

An unpaid carer has been defined as someone who looks after

"a partner, child, relative or friend who cannot manage without help because they are physically or mentally ill, frail or disabled. The carer may or may not live with the person they are caring for."

It is not difficult to begin to understand that the issue affects a huge number of people who live in our constituencies and communities. By carrying out the taxing and invaluable work of caring, such carers save the Scottish economy a staggering £7.6 billion every year. The costs to carers—not

only financially, but emotionally and socially—are less easy to quantify, as they often involve carers sacrificing their career, education and personal development to improve the lives of others.

That was confirmed in the committee's two round-table discussions. In the first evidence session, the committee sought the views of organisations that represent unpaid carers on the barriers to and the challenges and the impact of becoming a carer; the gaps in services; and accessibility to those services. It is encouraging that good practice was highlighted. Cases in point were the support strategy for carers and the opportunities for flexible working that the Scottish Court Service has implemented. However, I will focus on areas in which there is still room for improvement.

Although carers have a statutory right to an assessment, they have no right to services after they have been assessed. There should be a duty on local authorities to fulfil those assessments.

Respite care is crucial to enable unpaid carers to perform their roles. Despite that, there is no uniform standard of respite care among, or even within, local authorities—hence the suggestion that the Parliament should recommend a minimum standard.

Much of the evidence that was given focused on local authorities. However, it was suggested that carers should have an annual health MOT and that general practitioner practice nurses should take their blood pressure and do blood tests on them on the basis that it is better to prevent carers from becoming ill than to wait until a crisis point is reached at which there will be two casualties: the person who is cared for and the carer.

The impact that caring responsibilities can have on young carers was highlighted. Young carers can sometimes irritate teachers because their minds are always elsewhere and they lack concentration, for example. One simple solution that was proposed was that the child could be given a card that they could discreetly pass to the teacher, with no questions asked, to allow them to leave the classroom for five minutes to phone home.

One of the witnesses who spoke about young carers pointed out that the 2011 census will not include young carers at all. I promised to raise that matter with the Scottish Government, and I would appreciate the minister clarifying the situation in her speech.

It was observed that the largest number of complaints come from older carers who care for another older person, as they often have the most difficulty in accessing the full package of services that is required. Such difficulties often result in the



person for whom they care having to go into a residential home.

The committee was made aware that caring is often hidden within communities. People from ethnic groups, or those who care for people with alcohol or drug dependency or the children of individuals in prison, do not come forward, either because they do not understand the system or because they fear the stigma that is associated with their caring role. Equally, in some communities, there are high expectations, particularly of women, that the caring role will be kept within the family. The second evidence session, too, highlighted groups of carers who do not always get the support that they need, namely carers of people with mental health difficulties, including dementia; carers of children with disabilities; and carers in rural areas, who can find access to centralised services far too costly.

Four further compelling points were raised. First, despite the age profile of carers, there is little specific support for older carers, who have changing and different needs. Secondly, a culture of risk aversion has arisen around handling and moving disabled children, which means that parents have to undertake those tasks because professionals are being advised not to do so. Thirdly, in England, there is a commitment to establish a national helpline for carers, and carers organisations in Scotland would like a helpline here. Finally, in broader terms, the take-up of carer assessments has been very low and carers do not routinely have their needs assessed.

I realise that the origin of the debate is unusual, but I hope that the approach will inspire similar committee debates in the future, so that when a committee hears important evidence that is relatively non-contentious, it can bring that directly and quickly to the Scottish Government's attention, thus helping to influence policy without having to undertake a full committee inquiry. I very much hope that the content of this Equal Opportunities Committee debate will help to inform the development of the forthcoming carers strategy from the Scottish Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. I look forward to the minister's comments and to an update on progress on the strategy.

I move,

That the Parliament notes evidence gathered by the Equal Opportunities Committee on unpaid carers at its meetings on 25 March and 7 October 2008, which highlighted that there were around 660,000 unpaid carers in Scotland, a figure that represented one in eight of the population; recognises the valuable contribution that unpaid carers make in saving the Scottish economy £7.6 billion a year; further notes that around 40% of unpaid carers surveyed reported that their access to services was poor or that available services did not meet their needs, and calls on the Scottish Government to take into consideration the

evidence gathered when developing the forthcoming Scottish Government/COSLA carers strategy.

14:12

**The Minister for Public Health and Sport (Shona Robison):** I join Margaret Mitchell in passing on our condolences to David and Samantha Cameron for the loss of their son.

I welcome this debate on unpaid carers, which provides us with an opportunity to recognise the huge contribution that they make to Scottish society, which Margaret Mitchell pointed out, and to highlight the importance of supporting that dedicated group and exploring how best we can do that. I commend the previous Administration on its work to advance the unpaid carers policy. Its response to the 22 recommendations in the care 21 report—"The Future of Unpaid Care in Scotland"—provided a robust framework within which to develop unpaid carers policy. We intend to take that work further. The Government is fully committed to improving the identification of and support for Scotland's unpaid carers. I am confident that that commitment is shared by our local partners.

I am aware that there is cross-party agreement on the issue. However, more needs to be done to ensure that all carers have access to the support that they need. In recognition of that, as Margaret Mitchell notes in her motion, later this year, we will revise our national carers strategy in partnership with COSLA. The strategy will be informed by a review of progress against the recommendations of the care 21 report and by input from stakeholders. I welcome the efforts that the Equal Opportunities Committee has made to gather evidence on the issue. That evidence will inform the development of the national carers strategy, which will be a key document that will set out the long and short-term priorities in carer support for the Scottish Government and our local partners. It will be an aspirational strategy that puts unpaid carers firmly at the heart of health and social care policy. It will focus on the specific needs of young carers, with a stand-alone section on improving identification and support to prevent young carers from taking on inappropriate levels of caring. I hope that that gives Margaret Mitchell the reassurance that she requires on that point.

The strategy will be the driver for the development of future carers policy. However, since the Administration came into government, we have made support for carers a priority. We have already put in place several measures that will improve support for Scotland's unpaid carers. That includes the commitment in our concordat with local government to make progress towards an additional 10,000 respite weeks a year. We provided an additional £4 million, on top of the

existing resources in the local government settlement, to enable local authorities to deliver that commitment by 2011. To support local planning of that vital service, we published jointly with COSLA short breaks guidance to promote the development of personalised, flexible short breaks from caring, which meet the needs both of carers and of those for whom they care.

The Government recognises the need to provide carers with information and training to support them in their caring role. That is why we have invested £9 million over three years to support health boards in the implementation of the NHS carer information strategies. Those strategies are supporting improvements in carer identification and the provision of carer information and training throughout Scotland. They must include measures to meet the specific needs of young carers and carers from black and minority ethnic communities. We have assessed the strategies rigorously before granting ministerial approval to ensure that they meet all the minimum requirements that are set out in guidance.

We recognise the adverse effects that young caring has on the development, educational attainment and wellbeing of children and young people. Young carers should be enabled to be children and young people first and foremost. It is absolutely crucial that such young people are identified early and provided with support to enable them to reach their full potential. It is unacceptable that many of Scotland's young carers are falling through the net unidentified and unsupported. We have a responsibility to ensure that they are identified and supported in classrooms and communities throughout Scotland.

**Mary Mulligan (Linlithgow) (Lab):** I do not doubt the minister's commitment to identify young carers, but in my constituency in West Lothian, we have a well-organised carers organisation, which is currently funded through national lottery funding. It is about to come to an end, which means that young carers will cease to be identified and supported. What does the minister say about that?

**Shona Robison:** As part of the work that we will be doing with young carers, we will look at where projects and services are in Scotland, where they are not and what more we can do to support young carers services throughout Scotland. It was clear to me in talking to young carers at the young carers festival that there is a mixed bag of support for young carers throughout Scotland and we need to get better at ensuring more consistency. That is why COSLA's involvement is critical.

To support our work around young carers, we have developed a young carers services self-evaluation guide, which focuses on positive outcomes for young carers and their families, with an emphasis on partnership working.

In response to Mary Mulligan's intervention, I mentioned Scotland's first national young carers festival, which we funded. The event provided young carers attending with a break and some fun, which was important, but it was also important that it provided a national voice to a group that is often hidden. They certainly used that voice and without a doubt the festival raised the profile of young carers, with both local policy makers and the media. I was delighted to attend the festival, and the issues that were raised by young carers who attended will inform the development of the young carers section of the national strategy.

Quite simply, Scotland's health and social care services could not cope without the dedication and expertise of unpaid carers. It is vital that we provide the support that they require and this Government is committed to doing so by working with carers to achieve that end.

14:18

**Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab):** On behalf of the Labour Party, I extend our deepest sympathies to David and Samantha Cameron and their family. Of all that we have to deal with in life, I can think of little worse than the loss of a child.

Today's debate is important and all too short. I urge the minister to consider making a bid for a more substantial debate on the subject to allow us to track properly the situation, how policy needs to be developed and how resources must be directed to meet the needs of those who are being cared for as well as their carers. I am always amazed by people's capacity to care for others, the power of the love that drives daily self-sacrifice and the daily battle that they wage on behalf of their loved ones, rather than themselves.

Respite was mentioned. In my constituency, I know that people do not take up respite care places, at great cost to themselves, because they have no confidence in the quality of the respite care that is available. When we talk about shaping services, it is critical that we talk to and work with carers because they do not make their own needs a priority. We have to ensure that priority is given nevertheless. Carers and those for whom they care are our greatest resource in understanding the challenges. In passing, I pay tribute to greater Pollok carers centre for its energy and creativity in supporting carers and in driving the policy agenda.

When we discuss issues that relate to carers, it is recognised that carers are diverse. They include young carers, who are often—sadly—in the inappropriate position of caring for adults who have addiction problems and who have different needs from people who have medical conditions. Carers include families who care for disabled

children and elderly carers who care for a spouse or partner.

**Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP):** Does the member agree that the situation is difficult for older carers who are pensioners and who have no recourse to an allowance because of their pension? They might care for adults who are 60 or 65.

**Johann Lamont:** Elderly people face a huge challenge in coming to terms with their own age and continuing to care. Enable has highlighted the situation of elderly carers who look after sons and daughters with learning disabilities. Those people have cared for their children from childhood to adulthood. In their old age, they are haunted by the terrible fear of what will happen to their children when they die. I support Enable's call to local authorities to count the number of older carers of people with learning disabilities. How can we properly support those people if we do not know the extent of the problem?

In speaking to carers, I am always aware of their frustration and anger about the fact that although their issues are recognised, progress is slow. The problem is not just all for the Scottish Government. We sought to tackle the situation in government, but a huge amount has still to be done. The test for the current Government is not whether it has solved everything, but whether the action that it is taking will improve or worsen the situation. I fear that the situation will be made worse by single outcome agreements, for example, which do not require an equality impact assessment. The minister could say today that the Government will not accept such agreements unless they have been equality impact assessed. The £34 million to support families of disabled children was reported to have been rolled up in the local government settlement, but such spending has not been monitored or tracked, so we have no evidence.

As the for Scotland's disabled children campaign says, the critical point is that the money is not enough; we must ensure that we invest in improving services and that we transform those services. At the heart of the vision of the aiming high for disabled children programme was the idea that it would be transformational and that work would be undertaken with families to make the change. The liaison group has been given support, but it is disappointing that that is a drop in the ocean in comparison with what £34 million could have done to transform services in conjunction with carers.

I have no doubt that the minister is committed to tackling the issues of carers, but it is essential that that commitment is taken into the centre of the Government and that the Government addresses what is happening locally with funding, how the situation is being tackled and how carers and the

cared for will be put at the centre of shaping policy as well as receiving policy.

14:23

**Hugh O'Donnell (Central Scotland) (LD):** On the Liberal Democrats' behalf, I convey our sympathies to David and Samantha Cameron on their recent loss.

I am pleased to lead the debate for the Liberal Democrats, but I am disappointed that the evidence that emerged from the committee's meetings painted such a gloomy picture of how unsuccessfully we have dealt with many of the challenges that carers in Scotland face. I am pleased that, thus far in the debate, we have not followed the usual practice of pointing out the Administration's shortcomings in great detail. The Government is trying to make progress and the previous Administration had relative successes. We often have great party-political sport in such debate but, as far as I can see from the evidence, the truth is that we continue to let down a large percentage of the almost 700,000 carers in Scotland. In the process, we save the public purse a fortune.

Carers and their families will not thank us if—whether in this debate or in others—we engage in a political blame game about who has done the most, the least or the best for them. All the evidence that I heard during the committee's evidence-taking sessions on the issue seemed to indicate that what we have collectively done or are doing is either ineffective or inadequate. Access to support services is patchy, at best; in some instances, it is non-existent. It occurs to me that many people who play what Margaret Mitchell clearly defined as the caring role do not see themselves as carers and do not recognise that what they are engaged in comes under that heading. Part of the information strategy must be to help people to realise that they have taken on the role of carer and have rights as such.

Carers continue to be victims of social isolation, disruption of education, limited access to employment and training opportunities, and debt and benefit traps—the list is almost endless. Their physical and mental health can also suffer. Some of the steps that we have tried to take since the Parliament was created have been positive, but others verge on the farcical. How helpful is it for someone to be told, in one breath, that they are entitled to a needs assessment and, in the next, that there is no money to support that and that they do not have a statutory right to have the needs that have been recognised met? That is what is happening. During the round-table discussions, there was an almost palpable sense of frustration and disappointment about that among carers. If the projections are right, 20 per

cent of our population will be carers in the not-too-distant future, and an increasing number of those will be elderly. That is a huge demographic time bomb.

Thanks to their commitment and—dare I say it—love, carers currently save our economy a huge sum of money. Heaven help us and our budgets if they ever take collective action and, as a consequence, down tools. I doubt that the money that we have invested since the creation of the Parliament amounts to 10 per cent of the annual saving that carers provide.

We must make better progress on those issues, and carers must be further up our agenda. We need to deliver, and not just with warm words.

**The Presiding Officer:** I allowed opening speakers a little flexibility because of the warm and generous messages of condolence that they were conveying. I am afraid that I no longer have any flexibility on time, so I ask members to keep within their four-minute limit.

14:27

**Bill Kidd (Glasgow) (SNP):** As a member of the Equal Opportunities Committee, I am happy to speak on this issue. This morning I had the pleasure of attending the coalition of carers in Scotland's annual general meeting. I apologise to Cathy Peattie for the fact that she will have to listen again to pretty much the same speech, but I do not think that the issues that it raises have changed in the past couple of hours.

We all know that carers are the Cinderellas of the benefits system. That is not an irony, because the great majority of carers are women. In our society, the culture is to assume that it is natural for women to look after the family, so people ask why they should expect to be paid for doing so. That is the attitude that men have had down the years and, of course, most politicians are men. I hope that things may change.

I find it appalling that in this day and age carers are treated so shabbily that carers allowance is lower than any other benefit. I will concentrate on that issue, as members should be able to agree that bread-and-butter issues concern all of us.

The Westminster Government claims that reform of carers allowance is complicated and that it will get around to the issue in due course. That is fair enough, but due course has lasted a long time—carers are not looking for one review after another. All of us in the chamber, as well as members at Westminster, need to be aware that the issue of carers allowance is again in danger of being kicked into the long grass. The UK Government should implement the long-awaited review of

carers benefits now, in recognition of the essential role that carers play in our society.

In a recent motion that I lodged in the Scottish Parliament, I emphasised the inequity of carers allowances compared with other state benefits. I will not go through a huge list, but the state pension is £90.70 a week; incapacity benefit and employment and support allowance is £84.50; statutory sick pay is £75.40; jobseekers allowance is £60.50; and, at the bottom of the heap by a long way, carers allowance is £50.50.

Unpaid carers make a huge contribution to society as a whole, in respect of both wellbeing and public finance. As Mr O'Donnell said, they make a massive contribution to our society by taking on jobs for very little pay because they care; they care about the person whom they are looking after and, in my view, we take a loan of them. In the name of social justice, there should be an urgent and substantial increase in carers allowance to support more fittingly those who unselfishly sacrifice time, energy and often their own health to look after others. As a first step, carers allowance could be brought in line with the state pension, low though it is—I hope that we in this Parliament will put pressure on the people who have the power to do that—and then we should work towards the poverty threshold of £158 a week that was calculated in a Joseph Rowntree report.

Carers should have access to working tax credits under the 16-hour rule, rather than the ludicrous situation in which those who care gain such access only after 30 hours. Carers should be entitled to additional carers allowance on top of retirement pension, which at the moment has an overlap. Changes for carers have made a dent in what is needed, but continued political will is required. There is no room for anyone in any Parliament to rest on their laurels until the national disgrace of carers being treated as second-class citizens has been addressed. To do that, the Parliament must speak on carers' behalf on all issues, whether they are devolved or reserved to Westminster.

14:32

**Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab):** I, too, speak as a member of the Equal Opportunities Committee. We should recognise this as the first time that we have debated carers from an equal opportunities perspective as well as from the more normal health and social care perspective that we have adopted over the past 10 years.

The act that set up the Northern Ireland Assembly placed on public authorities in Northern Ireland an equal opportunities duty in relation to

carers. It is perhaps unfortunate that the Scotland Act 1998 did not do the same for Scotland, but it is not the legal obligation that matters—although such an obligation may be placed on us through a recent European Court of Justice ruling. We must take action because it is the right thing to do and because society depends on carers to such an enormous extent. Margaret Mitchell cited the figure of £7.6 billion saved from public expenditure by their work. We will all want to pay tribute to the work of carers, some of whom are in the public gallery today.

The evidence that we heard in our sessions was important, and I hope that it will feed into the forthcoming revised carer strategy. One of the key messages that we heard—it was disappointing for me to hear it—was that we do not have a partnership with carers, despite the fact that, on paper, the basis for carers policy over the past few years has been to have a partnership with carers. To a great extent, the fundamental cultural change has still to happen: we were told that too often the contribution of carers was assumed rather than negotiated by health and social care professionals.

Another disappointing piece of information was that there was such a low take-up of carer assessments—some members will remember that they were at the heart of the Community Care and Health (Scotland) Act 2002. Furthermore, there is nothing in the guidance that says that, when assessments take place, social workers should take account of carers' employment and education needs. That is required in England, and we should certainly look to ensure that it is required in Scotland—in addition, of course, to addressing the more fundamental point that action has to be taken on those assessments.

A further concern is the variation among local authorities in what they do for carers and the fact that the defined outcomes under the single outcome agreements rarely indicate anything to do with carers. That leads us on to the national minimum standards on short breaks—although such standards could of course apply to other aspects of support for carers.

We welcome the £4 million extra for short breaks that the minister recently announced, but at the committee's hearings witnesses made the more general point that there needs to be far more flexibility in how short breaks are provided. The minister talked about personalisation and taking account of carers' needs. I hope that the new guidance that she issued recently will help to ensure that that becomes a reality.

We were also told that, in the minds of carers, advice and information are second only to short breaks. We welcome what the minister said about money to health boards and work on information and support for carers, and I hope that the

Scottish Government will consider the suggestion that there should be a national helpline for carers, which would be similar to the helpline that I think is about to be established in England. Carers themselves made that suggestion.

The key message is that we must address the need for support for carers now. We all know that we are entering a period in which public expenditure will come under more pressure, but it would be madness to cut support for carers. In simple public expenditure terms—as Margaret Mitchell reminded us when she talked about the £7.6 billion that carers save the Scottish economy—the right thing to do is to provide more support to carers.

14:36

**Elizabeth Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** I welcome the debate and echo the concerns that members expressed about the amount of work that has to be done. It is all too easy for our words to sound slightly hollow, given the commitment that so many carers give in an entirely selfless and humble manner. As the minister said, their commitment often goes undetected.

The debate has highlighted a considerable number of challenges and sends a strong message to us all. I will concentrate on three areas. First, Carers Scotland has collected worrying evidence that 40 per cent of carers find that their access to services is poor and that the services that are available do not always meet their needs. The situation often means that the carer must make a personal sacrifice: for example, many carers are forced to stop working, to reduce the hours they work or to move to a more junior position. The problem can be more acute in rural areas, where fewer resources are available and the cost of accessing centralised services is often higher. Carers Scotland has raised an important issue.

Secondly, in an age in which we are witnessing a huge increase in the elderly population, it is essential that we consider young carers. None of us knows how many young people are involved in caring for elderly grandparents. They face problems at school because of the time that they have to give up to care for another person—that gives cause for concern about the qualifications that they are undertaking—and there are emotional and social issues. Such problems can lead to truancy, neglect and the development of hostile relationships. The issue is sensitive, and it is extremely important that we take it seriously.

Thirdly, the work of carers in the paid sector could be seriously undermined by members of the European Parliament in certain parties who have

voted to abandon Britain's opt-out from the 48-hour working week. If Labour and the Liberals get their way on that, it will be the end of caring arrangements as we know them in the formal sector. We must think carefully about what that would mean for people in the unpaid sector, because there could be serious repercussions for shift workers and continuity of care. That is a very serious message for Scotland and for those MEPs.

I have argued in previous debates that far more must be done to use work that is carried out by voluntary sector organisations. During a debate a couple of weeks ago, I said that the sector is a "gold nugget" as far as provision is concerned. That message also emerged strongly from the committee's consideration. Good projects are happening, but there is not enough such activity. Members have made plain exactly what we must do. Margaret Mitchell talked about the increased media attention that carers have received, particularly as a result of John Suchet's comments about Alzheimer's disease. Carers experience great pain and suffering; they can be left feeling utterly isolated and unsupported as well as emotionally drained.

Carers save the Scottish taxpayer billions of pounds each year, and we are indebted to them for that. It is crucial that we recognise the sacrifices that they make every day to provide a future for the person in their care. I hope that the Government will take away the message that this is a serious debate, which deserved much more than an hour of parliamentary time.

14:39

**Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD):** Young carers face day-to-day challenges and responsibilities that they should not have to. All youngsters should be able to enjoy their childhoods, but sadly, as we know, young carers are being robbed of that right. At Wick high school alone, there are perhaps 70 carers, although they are not aware that they are young carers. That was Hugh O'Donnell's point: they just think that that is how life is.

Young carers need our attention and support because they are society's unsung heroes. They take care of the bulk of household chores, make meals, and care for younger siblings and ailing parents on top of the typical responsibilities of going to school and learning. There are often not enough hours in the day for them and, as we all know, young carers sometimes miss school.

I will give two examples from my constituency. The first is a teenage girl, one of 10 siblings. In the morning, she must help feed her family and help them get ready for school. She is at school all day,

comes home and is responsible for most of the household chores. She makes dinner, gets her family washed and ready for bed, and then she gets to start on her homework—she is studying for her prelims.

The second example is a girl in primary school whose single mother is a drug addict. The girl is 10 and she takes care of herself and a younger brother. They get themselves ready for school as best they can and often go to school not properly dressed—missing socks and so on. The school feeds them toast in the morning, which is good because they do not get any breakfast at home, and they get lunch at school, which is a mercy. When the girl comes home from school there is often no electricity and no food, so that 10-year-old youngster has to walk to the shops to buy what food she can. She takes care of her brother at night, and there is no time to do homework. She is often just plain exhausted anyway.

The good news is that there are organisations in my constituency that support such youngsters. Caithness young carers is a new project that operates alongside the Wick family centre. It works closely with Wick high school to identify young carers and reach out to them, and it runs weekly drop-in sessions in which the youngsters can come to the family centre. They can relax there, have some fun and get individual support from staff and—this is important—develop friendships with others in the same situation. The ultimate goal of Caithness young carers is to let those youngsters know that they are not on their own.

In Sutherland, there is an organisation called The Young Karers East Sutherland—TYKES—which members will perhaps remember from a play that it put on in a previous parliamentary session, when we were in our old place. TYKES is an established organisation that started in 1997. Since then, it has helped more than 200 youngsters, and it currently provides support to 64 young carers, most of whom are between the all-too-young ages of seven and 11.

TYKES's goal is to foster a community environment in which it and organisations like it are no longer necessary because the community—that is, us—supports the children. That goal might not be achieved in the near future, which means that such organisations will continue to be truly vital. They provide after-school services, individual support and life-skills training workshops, as well as week-long trips to give the youngsters the breaks that they desperately need. I wish that there were more organisations like TYKES and Caithness young carers, but money is uncertain and remoteness is a huge issue in my constituency. Nevertheless, I praise them to the

skies for what they do, and I have no doubt that all my fellow MSPs do the same.

I welcome what the minister said, but I ask the Scottish Government to do two things when it gets time: look closely at the two organisations to which I referred, because there is much to be learned from them; and consider, in the way that the minister indicated, how the Scottish Government can better help those organisations, because funding, advice and a friendly word from Edinburgh can make all the difference to the youngsters in my constituency who are in the situation that I described.

14:43

**Christopher Harvie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP):** I congratulate Margaret Mitchell on lodging the motion.

For two or three hours a day, I am a carer to my parents, who have reached their 10<sup>th</sup> decade. They are a bit wobbly on their feet and need most of their meals cooked for them, but they still enjoy life and do so in their own home. They have mastered the microwave and digital television, although that was a narrow action.

Combining being a carer with work can mean getting up at 5 in the morning and going to bed at 9, if I am lucky. Given problems with false teeth going walkabout, catheters or the elderly's wayward sense of time, an unbroken night can be a luxury. Even on a part-time basis, it is still a stressful life, but statistics tell us that this is the mildest end of the spectrum—it can occupy the carer full time, with little respite or rest. Yet for our friend Bashir Ahmad, who regularly asked after my parents, to look after the old and frail was the fulfilment of the moral life and a source of pride and dignity.

I think of Wordsworth's poem "The Old Cumberland Beggar", in which an old man wanders almost unconscious from house to house in the lake district. By caring for him, the community keeps itself together:

"Where'er the aged Beggar takes his rounds,  
The mild necessity of use compels  
To acts of love; and habit does the work  
Of reason; yet prepares that after-joy  
Which reason cherishes. And thus the soul,  
By that sweet taste of pleasure unpursued,  
Doth find herself insensibly disposed  
To virtue and true goodness."

Wordsworth probably got the idea from Burns's notion of the social union or from Adam Smith's idea of the sympathy that must underlie society, which he saw as essential.

The statistics tell us that unpaid catering saves the Scottish economy £7.6 billion a year out of a total annual domestic production of about

£150 billion. If we counted its value, it would amount to 5 per cent of our wealth. The state's contribution, as calculated from UK figures, amounts to perhaps less than 2 per cent, which is a tiny proportion. We know all too well what the effects of those responsibilities are on the 660,000 carers in Scotland, and they are not reassuring.

What looms before us not only is challenging but could be desperate. Besides catering for the elderly and the disabled, we have other problems—obesity, diabetes and the damage from alcohol and drug abuse. The total affected is perhaps pushing 400,000, and the statistics show the detrimental health effects that providing care has on the carers themselves, who are often women and may be older folk. I remember Mary, the good soul who cared for my aunt when my aunt was in her late 80s. Mary was endlessly cheerful in juggling her wee jobs: a disabled husband, an unexpected grandchild and cleaning for several households. She was selfless, and she kept going by cheerfulness, strong tea and cigarettes. She was dead at 60.

Among the things that are desperately needed for Scotland's unpaid carers are rights to respite and support to protect them from debt, from discrimination in the workplace and education, and from ill health incurred while serving their loved ones. We need to call on new resources; that is an important point.

At the Scottish Urban Regeneration Forum last year, I argued for a social or community year as practised in Scandinavia and Germany. If we offered that to young people in the gap period between school and university, their efforts could be reimbursed in the form of educational credit and assistance for students. That would enhance public attention to the issue of unpaid care and ease the burden for carers while giving young people the chance to gain both educational and social experience. When I have mentioned the idea to the kids that one meets during their visits to Holyrood, I have been struck by the welcome that they have given it. The social or community year would not only meet a social need but enhance the self-respect and life chances of a new generation.

**The Presiding Officer:** We come to closing speeches.

14:48

**Ross Finnie (West of Scotland) (LD):** This debate on such a hugely important subject has barely begun and yet it is drawing to a close. I share Margaret Mitchell's expressed hope that there will be similar debates on the subject; more important, I share Johann Lamont's hope that future debates will be of a much longer duration.

All of us who are present in the chamber must speak to our respective business managers to explain to them that a topic of such importance deserves a much greater time allocation.

Members have mentioned the £7.6 billion that carers contribute to the economy. For me, the most important point is that carers themselves do not care about that figure. They never think about it because of what we all understand is the selfless giving that carers perform without care for the money that they save the economy and, at times, without care for themselves.

All members from across the political spectrum who have contributed to this important but short debate have made clear the vital role that carers play. Just as important is the fact that the evidence that was presented to the committee revealed the stress or strain that carers endure without bringing it to our attention. As a consequence, we as politicians must remember that, among the raft of priorities that we constantly face, those who do not shout do not always receive our attention.

Here is a body of people that does a lot for our society and communities, and they deserve more than we are giving them. Of course, we have tried during the past 10 years since the Parliament was established, but it is clear that we have to do more. My party is clear that many of the measures that are being pursued are going in the right direction, but one thing that is equally clear is the lack of consistency in the delivery of support for carers across Scotland.

I have what I hope is a constructive suggestion to make to the minister. I happen to think that outcome agreements have merits, but we have now moved far beyond the rhetoric of "We have signed an historic agreement". In this case, outcome agreements offer an opportunity to set the standard for the level of care, whether it is for support or, as Bill Kidd eloquently explained, for consistent financial delivery. We are not telling local authorities how to work, but an outcome agreement should seek a standard format.

**Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab):** Does the member agree that organisations such as the Princess Royal Trust for Carers and others have real problems because single outcome agreements do not take their needs on board?

**Ross Finnie:** I am making the more general point that there is merit in the principle of an outcome agreement, but it must deliver. I hope that the minister will acknowledge that we must now move to a point where the agreements can be measured and tested so that we can obtain a benefit from them that I hope will address the particular problem that the member has raised.

I make my point to the minister in all sincerity. Issues have been raised this afternoon about

access to and the range of services and about the delivery of financial benefits that the Parliament and Government agreed but which are not being delivered uniformly across Scotland. There is a bit of a postcode lottery for support and financial support—that is exactly what the Government does not intend but it is the consequence of a failure to achieve a uniformity of delivery for our carers.

The debate has been helpful if regrettably rather short. It has highlighted huge issues for our society, but there is consensus throughout the chamber that we need to do more. We must ensure that we do not just talk but deliver.

14:53

**Cathy Jamieson (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab):** Like other members, I congratulate the Equal Opportunities Committee on its approach to the issue—it is useful when issues are brought to the chamber fairly quickly to give us the opportunity to debate them. Like others, I would have liked a longer debate, and I am sure that that point will be taken on board.

During the debate, I was struck by the number of times that we heard carers being described as selfless, about the humility that we all show in response to the work that they do, and about the sacrifices that they make when they look after their loved ones. However, in the recent mini round-table meetings that I have had with carers, I was struck by how they talk about fighting, struggling, shouting, battling and having to make a real effort to get their voices heard. The lesson is that, despite the good intentions of the former and current Administrations, there is still a gulf between what we want and what needs to happen and what is actually happening on the ground. Today's debate has to be a lesson for us that it is not enough just to describe the problem and agree that we know what it is; we must also work on solutions. If we have another debate on the issue, I hope that we will focus on the solutions as much as on describing the problems.

I have no doubt about Shona Robison's genuine interest in pursuing the agenda, but we must watch that her genuine interest and commitment is matched by those who have their hands on the purse strings. That is why I was particularly interested in what Johann Lamont, Malcolm Chisholm and Ross Finnie said about the need to ensure that the money that is put in at local government and health board level to support carers and to support a strategy delivers outcomes.

It is right that carers can ask for an assessment but, given that they have no right to any services



or help beyond that, it is no wonder that they ask what the point is of an assessment.

I do not want to sound an entirely discordant note on young carers, but the minister talked about conducting a mapping exercise and I worry that in some cases that might be too late. If projects close down while the mapping exercise is carried out, the young carers who use those projects will not benefit from it. I make a plea to the minister to examine what is happening on the ground and to ensure that no young carers project closes while the mapping exercise is under way.

A concern has been raised with me about elderly parents who care for older children or carers who look after other adults and the lack of services that provide local options for those people as they grow older. It is assumed that it is okay for them to sit in the house rather than be out and about taking part in constructive activities. We need to keep an eye on that.

I could have focused on numerous issues, such as respite care and the need for better joining up of health and social work, but in the short time that I have left I will ask several questions, to which I hope that the minister will respond either today or in future. How many carers across Scotland have been assessed as having unmet need? What progress has been made on the moving and handling report? Like other members, I would like to know how many elderly carers might need a different approach. What progress is being made to ensure that aids and adaptations are made available quickly so that the people who need them can live and be cared for or provide care in their own homes? How will the £34 million, which we all agree could transform the lives of many disabled children, be tracked to ensure that that outcome is delivered?

Those are issues that carers have raised with us, and it is our responsibility to heed what they say and, as has been said, to move on from just talking to ensuring that we have a strategy that results in real action.

14:57

**Shona Robison:** We have had an extremely useful, if short, debate. It is clear that all parties endorse the idea that we need to improve support for Scotland's unpaid carers. I acknowledge the comments of Johann Lamont, Ross Finnie and others on the shortness of the debate and undertake to find out how we can create further opportunities for the Parliament to discuss what is an important issue in more detail and at a time that will allow feed-in to the development of the carers strategy and the review of the progress of care 21.

As has been said, Scotland's unpaid carers, of whom there are more than 600,000, represent the

largest section of the care workforce. To enable carers to continue in their vital role, it is essential that there is early identification of their caring role and that they have access to the support that they need.

I am aware that there is a great deal of excellent practice around carer support in local authorities, health boards and the voluntary sector—I have witnessed that at first hand. However, as some members have said and as I am aware from speaking to carers, there are areas in which practice is less well developed. More needs to be done to ensure that carers can access the support that they need when they need it.

I will try to respond to the points that have been made during the debate and will write to the members to whom I do not respond. In response to Margaret Mitchell, I should have mentioned in my opening speech that although the census questionnaire for 2011 has not been finalised, a census rehearsal that is planned for the end of March will include a question on unpaid caring. As far as I am aware, that seems to be the case, but I will keep an eye on the situation.

Bill Kidd and Sandra White mentioned the benefits trap. I can inform members that during the development of the UK Government's carer strategy, I wrote to the responsible minister, Ivan Lewis, the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Care Services, to highlight areas that would impact on Scottish carers, including issues around income and employment. I drew his attention to the relevant sections of the care 21 report, as Scottish carers were keen for us to do. Many issues of financial support will have to be resolved.

Malcolm Chisholm spoke about employment. I think that there is some debate in England over whether there is a duty around employment there. Whether there is or not, his point was well made and I will be happy, as part of revising the carers strategy, to explore ways of supporting carers so that they can balance employment with their caring responsibilities.

Malcolm Chisholm, Johann Lamont and, I think, Ross Finnie referred to single outcome agreements. I will make two quick points. Single outcome agreements are high-level documents that are not intended to replace all the underlying arrangements for service planning and performance management in local authorities. I have been directly encouraging local partnerships to make the connection between single outcome agreements and national frameworks. One of those frameworks is the community care outcomes framework, which contains a measure on support for carers. I have been encouraging all partners to adopt that particular measure.

**Johann Lamont:** The agreements are high-level strategic documents, but we would nevertheless expect them to identify priorities. How many single outcome agreements mention carers or a carers strategy?

**Shona Robison:** Many of them refer to the community care outcomes framework, which is an essential part of bringing together all the important community care indicators. Selecting one particular indicator is not the best way to make progress; we should consider all the indicators as a package. That is why the community care outcomes framework brings all the indicators together. That will be important in providing support to carers and service users. The framework was started under the previous Administration, of which Johann Lamont was a member. I hope that she will therefore be able to support it.

Tracking is important. We have a framework in place that will allow COSLA to track the delivery of the 10,000 extra respite weeks. COSLA will report to us annually to inform us of progress across all Scotland's councils. Tracking will help to ensure that those weeks are delivered. Perhaps I have a little more faith in our local authority colleagues than Johann Lamont has. I hope that they share our commitment on carers.

Local authorities' expenditure on support for carers was measured back in 2006-07, at which time more than £100 million was being spent on carers services. I have no reason to believe that the amount has done anything other than increase. Resources are being spent on carers services. However, I accept that more has to be done, which is why the extra £13 million has been invested in health boards and local authorities. We should expect our colleagues in local authorities to want to deliver those services, just as we do. I have faith that the issue is a priority for local authorities.

Cathy Jamieson asked me a number of questions to which it would be difficult to respond in any detail now, but I will write to her. The questions were pertinent and they can be considered as part of the review of progress so far and as part of progress on the national carers strategy.

I hope that my responses have given members a flavour of my views; I will write to members whose points I have not been able to cover.

15:04

**Marlyn Glen (North East Scotland) (Lab):** On behalf of the Equal Opportunities Committee, I thank the members who have participated in today's debate. Some valuable contributions have been made. I also thank all the witnesses who

gave their time to share their expertise with the committee, and I thank the minister for her response so far—especially on organising a longer debate on this issue.

The debate has been unusual, in that the Equal Opportunities Committee has not produced a committee report for the Parliament to consider. Instead, we have used the debate as an opportunity to highlight directly to ministers and members some of the key issues that were raised during the two meetings that the committee held on unpaid carers. We appreciate the fact that this approach may not always be appropriate, but given the fact that the Scottish Government is currently updating its policy on unpaid carers, it seemed a sensible way in which to proceed. It is also in keeping with the Scottish Parliament's key principles of power sharing and being accessible, responsive and participative.

The topic is clearly a matter of concern for the people of Scotland, given the recent parliamentary debate on kinship care and various current motions on unpaid carers. The relevant statistics show its importance. As the convener of the Equal Opportunities Committee and others have noted, there are an estimated 660,000 unpaid carers who, it is estimated, save the Scottish economy £7.6 billion a year.

The Equal Opportunities Committee was specifically concerned to know whether carers faced discrimination or barriers and whether specific groups of carers had particular issues. We trust that our focus on those issues has provided the Scottish Government with a useful head start, especially given its stated commitment to the equality impact assessment of its policies.

Although we spoke to a wide range of expert organisations, there were one or two gaps in the evidence that the Scottish Government and COSLA might want to consider. For example, although we had a discussion about the particular issues for minority ethnic carers, one of the relevant organisations was, unfortunately, unable to attend. We know that work is being undertaken in that area, and some members attended an informative meeting of the cross-party group on carers at which the topic was addressed. Similarly, some organisations that represent business interests were unable to attend the committee. Given the impact that caring can have on an individual's ability to join or remain in the labour market, that perspective definitely requires consideration.

Focusing on the world of work, I highlight the recent development in the European Court of Justice that was brought to our attention. The issue has been mentioned by Malcolm Chisholm. In brief, it seems that it will now be unlawful to treat an employee less favourably because of their

association with a disabled person. That development may well have major ramifications for the way in which businesses treat employees who care for a disabled person, and it needs to be looked at with great urgency.

The committee was delighted to welcome the Scottish Court Service to give evidence. We had been told that it was an excellent example of an employer with an enlightened attitude to staff with caring responsibilities. We should seek to learn from such examples of good practice as well as being critical of areas in which expectations are not being met.

If the Scottish Government and COSLA are looking even wider for examples of good practice, they will be interested to note the approach to carers that has been adopted in Northern Ireland, which was outlined by Margaret Mitchell. In Northern Ireland, there is an obligation on public bodies to promote equality between people who have dependants and those who do not.

There is no doubt about our appreciation of the role of unpaid carers. They may not always get the recognition that they deserve, but I am sure that all members recognise the rich contribution that unpaid carers make to our society. We trust that the Scottish Government will reflect carefully on the evidence that the committee heard and take the action that is required to ensure that the contribution of unpaid carers is adequately supported.

## Community Policing

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman):** The next item of business is a debate on motion S3M-3439, in the name of Bill Aitken, on behalf of the Justice Committee, on the report of its inquiry into community policing.

15:09

**Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con):** It gives me considerable pleasure to present the Justice Committee's report on its inquiry into community policing. It has been a worthwhile exercise that has been both informative and constructive. I am also pleased that, in his letter dated 20 February, the Cabinet Secretary for Justice updated us on the vital issues of police recruitment and the new arrangements that are to be brought into effect with regard to the payment of police pensions. His letter also narrated the Scottish community policing engagement principles. Those are very important features, which enable today's debate to take place against an encouraging background.

Parliament will be aware that the Justice Committee carried out its inquiry in two stages—we have reported previously on the initial aspects of our work. In preparing our report, we had five evidence sessions. Thirty witnesses gave evidence, and that evidence was augmented by fact-finding visits to Dundee, the Scottish Borders and Motherwell. One visit to Central Scotland Police had to be cancelled due to an emergency situation that arose in that area. I put on record my thanks and the thanks of the committee to the witnesses who gave so willingly of their time and those in the police divisions and local government who facilitated and informed our visits.

Evidence was given by chief constables and by Sir Ronnie Flanagan, Her Majesty's chief inspector of constabulary for England and Wales. We entered pioneering ground in carrying out a videoconference session with Professor Wesley Skogan of Northwestern University in Chicago. We also heard from police conveners, community representatives and the Scottish Police Federation.

The committee's methodology was to pose certain questions. Although those are too numerous to mention this afternoon, we sought to concentrate our considerations under a few general headings, namely what the police and stakeholders regard as community policing and what level of priority is given to that facet of police work. We also sought examples of good practice and factors that might impede the production of a good community policing service.

Early in the inquiry, we had to accept that there is no one-cap-fits-all solution. Although there is a

common thread through all policing activity, the strategies and techniques that are appropriate in, for example, Glasgow city centre are not appropriate in small rural towns in the Borders or the Highlands. We recognise that not only does there have to be autonomous thinking in the police authorities, but there must be different approaches in police divisions, particularly those that cover wide areas containing a variety of different problems and challenges.

It is perhaps important to stress that I can detect no political will at this stage to change the situation that arose in 1975 following the last but one reform of local government, whereby eight regional police forces were established. At the same time, it must be recognised that a much greater degree of collaborative working will be necessary—between forces and within forces—if the police are to be able to face the new and quite different challenges that now confront them and, indeed, wider society.

I think that there has been general disappointment that the Scottish Police Services Authority has not achieved what was in the thoughts of Parliament when we passed, unanimously, the Police, Public Order and Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act 2006. One can only hope that the matter can be sorted out in the months and years ahead so that resources can be concentrated on up-front policing.

Although the evidence that we obtained in the inquiry underlined the difficulty in defining community policing, there was remarkable consensus from witnesses about what they regarded as the essential characteristics. Visibility and accessibility were top of the list. People want readily identifiable and named officers working in their area, and that area should be clearly defined.

It was clear from the evidence that we received from a number of witnesses that the effectiveness of the approach that has been taken has been reduced by a high turnover of community police officers in individual areas and by the level of abstractions whereby officers are removed for specific inquiries, sometimes lasting several days, and to police sporting events. The committee recognises senior officers' problems in fulfilling the requirements to police football matches, international conferences, rock concerts and other events, but it is to be hoped that abstractions can be kept to a minimum.

The evidence that suggests that there is a high turnover of police officers in community policing roles is not without genuine difficulty. The career ambitions of officers must be recognised, but the committee firmly endorses the view that officers in a community policing role should be retained in that role for at least two years. Those who demonstrate effectiveness should be encouraged to stay in their post. Central Scotland Police and

Strathclyde Police have made some progress in that respect, and we invite other forces to go down that route.

The police service is not isolated; it is required more and more frequently to dovetail with other organisations and agencies. It is clear that, where partnership working is essential, it is helpful for community policing to be organised along broadly the same lines as other agencies organise their work. Strathclyde Police has gone down that road. It was clear from the evidence that partnership working, where it exists, adds to the impact that policing and other services have on localised problems.

It is a given that a community policing team that operates in a specific area will get to know that area geographically and the people who live there. That can, depending on an individual officer's conduct, be a negative or a positive experience, but it is important that the police know who has the capacity to assist them, who the local opinion-formers are and who might present problems. The community policing system that has been introduced by Strathclyde Police and is now being rolled out fairly firmly in that area should assist.

In an interesting evidence session, Professor Skogan dealt with the way in which civic engagement is considered by Chicago police to be one of their most important roles. They carry out quite far-reaching surveys and hold public meetings, which, I understand, sometimes cause some excitement.

In his recent report, Her Majesty's chief inspector of constabulary for Scotland highlights a number of issues on which there is a seeming lack of engagement. In what is basically a very positive report that reflects well on all concerned, there is a statistic that needs to be addressed. It is clear from the figures that are provided that the overwhelming majority of the public are impressed with the initial police contact when they require to notify the police of some event. However, satisfaction levels fall when the respondent is asked about the overall police approach to dealing with the matter; and they fall dramatically when respondents are asked whether they are kept adequately informed of progress and outcomes. That matter needs to be addressed.

We congratulate the police on the steps that have been taken to engage with the public by means of circular surveys and so on, but it is clear that more needs to be done. For example, although we can well understand the disappointment and frustration of Fife Constabulary, which issued 2,400 surveys last year and got a 21 per cent return, we need to consider a more imaginative approach.

One of the features of modern-day life is the need for constant self-assessment. The committee's report identifies quantitative and qualitative measures that have been introduced by the police service. If communities are to be truly convinced that community policing initiatives are impacting positively, they need regular and reliable indicators of success in a digestible format. Although the police boards have a key role in scrutinising community policing and its effectiveness, the committee once again underlines its recommendation from its previous report that the framework measures must be available at more local levels and not just force-wide. That will ensure greater scrutiny of community policing by those who are most affected: namely, the communities themselves.

I genuinely think that we are on the right lines. It is encouraging to see the progress that has been made during the past years. In particular, the committee has been encouraged by the Cabinet Secretary for Justice's response to us a few days ago, from which it appears that he has been heavily influenced by the committee's work and research. One hopes that that is an indication of things that will happen under different headings in the times ahead, but it is clear that Mr MacAskill has adopted many of the recommendations in our report, which he has now confirmed will be put into operation. That is a good thing.

In the chamber and in the Justice Committee in particular, I am pleased to say, we recognise that we are here to provide a good service to the public. One of the most important services that we can provide is to ensure that the policing of Scotland's communities is not only up to scratch but having a positive impact on the lives of all our constituents. We are heading down a road that will bring that about.

I caution the cabinet secretary on police numbers. I hear what he has to say on that and I am confident that he is making every possible effort to ensure that he adheres to his promise, but I make it clear that, if he fails to do so, there will be a consequence.

We are making progress. The committee's report highlights certain ways forward. I am pleased that Mr MacAskill has accepted them and hopeful that many of the police forces and boards will accept them, too. It gives me much pleasure to move the motion.

I move,

That the Parliament notes the conclusions and recommendations contained in the Justice Committee's 18th Report, 2008 (Session 3): *Report on Inquiry into Community Policing* (SP Paper 155).

15:20

**The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill):** I welcome the convener's comments and the Justice Committee's report on community policing. I am grateful for his words about the progress that is being made. Like the committee's previous report on police resources, the report on community policing is a timely, thorough and well-researched piece of work. It addresses important issues, and the Justice Committee has certainly contributed to our thinking on them.

As the convener mentioned, policing is not partisan or political. That is how it has always been and how it should remain. We require a partnership between political parties to ensure that we get the best out of our police forces, just as we require a partnership between our communities and police forces to ensure that we have the safest and most secure communities possible.

I echo the favourable comments that the convener made regarding our policemen and policewomen. The Government wishes to put it on record that all ranks in all parts of our country serve our communities well. Policing is a difficult and sometimes dangerous job, but Scotland is well served by its police officers, who make a great contribution. From experience, I know that many not only contribute through their day jobs but do a great deal in our communities above and beyond that.

Scotland is a diverse country, with a diverse population, a diverse landscape and diverse communities in which we choose to live. That is part of the fabric of our society. Our police work well to reflect that diversity and strive to police each community in the most appropriate manner. They are able to do that job well because they are not only from our communities, but for our communities.

Effective policing of our communities needs to reflect those communities. What operates in Gairloch is not necessarily what is needed or what we want in Glasgow. That is why the Scottish Government has worked with stakeholders, including the police, to develop the Scottish community policing engagement principles, which I have already shared with the committee as a work in progress.

I firmly believe that communities should have a clear understanding of the level of policing that they have a right to expect, how that is being delivered and how their views are taken into account. Clearly, sometimes it is hard to achieve that, and those matters have to be worked at. The story about Fife Constabulary's attempt to gain information through a survey is not to be seen as a criticism of the force; it shows the difficulties that can be faced. We have to try to engage and, if it

does not work in one way, we have to try other ways.

The community policing engagement principles set out how each force will produce its own community engagement standard that will tell communities how to get in touch with their local officers. That is not meant to be twee; we need to ensure that people do not have to dial 999 or other numbers and that they have other ways to get in touch with officers. The standard will also tell people the maximum length of time that they should have to wait to see a police officer on a non-emergency matter—because that can be a frustrating experience—and it will set out how the police will engage with communities, local businesses and other organisations to help solve problems in the community.

I have also been struck by the work that is going on in each Scottish force to reassert the priority of community policing. I will pick just a few examples. Central Scotland Police is undertaking a mixed-economy pilot, which seeks to release more officers for front-line and community policing, ensuring that others who are not qualified police officers—who do not have the badge of office—deal with matters with which they can appropriately deal. Fife Constabulary is undertaking an internal strategic review that will enhance front-line service delivery and, in Lothian and Borders Police, there is a resource allocation deployment review.

Unprecedented police numbers in Strathclyde have allowed Chief Constable Stephen House to develop a robust community policing model. The number of people engaged in community policing in Strathclyde will rise from 527 last year to 1,127 by the end of March 2009.

However, community policing also involves responding to incidents. We all know that we must get the balance right. People must be available to chew the fat, discuss problems and spend time allaying fears with elderly and young people in our communities to ensure that they see that the police are the fabric of the community and can be approached. Equally, information must be gathered, things must be found out and our constituents' clear requirements must be met. If a serious incident happens, an officer must arrive at it quickly and efficiently.

As MSPs, we repeatedly hear from our constituents that policing needs to be both community based and responsive in order to meet our needs. That is not impossible, but it is difficult to manage. Officers are doing both types of policing to the best of their abilities—they are doing remarkably well.

Having spoken about the work that is being carried out in forces, I will touch on the work that

the Scottish Government is doing to support policing for our communities.

I firmly believe that Government's role is not to micromanage the delivery of policing on the ground; rather, it is to add value at a national, strategic level. We have done that, and are seeking to continue to do it, in a variety of ways. We have added value through our commitment to deliver 1,000 more police officers. We are delivering on that commitment, with 450 police officers now coming through. We are fully funding the policy through payments to forces of £16.5 million to date.

I will give further evidence of our support for the police. In the current year, we have provided an additional £32.8 million to fund the additional costs of changes in the pension commutation rates for fire and police officers. Those costs were not initially factored in, and considerable dismay would have been caused in our communities if they had not been addressed. We therefore sought to work with the conveners of police boards and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities to ensure that the problem, which was not anticipated, was addressed. What we have done will ensure both that 1,000 additional officers will be delivered and that we will be able to meet the legitimate pension rights of officers who have served our communities well. The pensions issue may have come from left field, but officers had an entitlement, and the national Government, police boards and local government are obliged to meet officers' rights and entitlements. After all, they have served our communities.

We have put in place arrangements to measure the recruitment of and spending on the additional officers, and we will capture the impact of that work through developing a basket of measures from the annual Scottish policing performance framework. We are supporting a pilot shared recruitment service with the aim of bringing greater consistency and reducing the burden on forces, and we are examining ways of improving the retention of valuable policing skills in the workforce. The Government is committed to the three Rs: recruiting 1,000 additional officers; redeploying officers, which has been especially successful in Strathclyde and elsewhere; and retaining valuable officers who have served our communities well, are popular, have great knowledge and can continue to do an excellent job. We cannot make all those officers stay if they choose to retire, but it is clear that the retention of some of them would benefit our communities. The police have demonstrated their ability to innovate through delivering nearly £67 million in efficiency savings in 2007-08. They will continue to identify efficiency savings.

However, all those initiatives are simply a means to an end. Our vision is of safer streets, reduced crime and reduced fear of crime through an effective, efficient and visible police service that has the trust and respect of the communities that it serves.

I put on record my thanks for the efforts of Her Majesty's chief inspector of constabulary, Paddy Tomkins, who will step down in April this year. Throughout his career, he has contributed greatly to Scottish policing. In the "Independent Review of Policing in Scotland", which was published on 23 January, he identified a number of issues that we still have to tackle in order to ensure that we can be confident in our abilities to police all the risks that all our communities face. I am determined to take action to address the issues that are raised in the review. In doing that, it is important that I draw on the views and expertise of others, particularly those of stakeholders and COSLA.

The Scottish Government is committed to engaging with partners and stakeholders in the coming weeks to consider how we can address the issues that have been raised on the provision of specialist services, accountability, governance and service standards. Those are important issues that we need to consider carefully and fully. Paddy Tomkins's review and the work that it has set in train will stand us in good stead for the challenges and opportunities that face policing in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In the spirit set out by the convener of the Justice Committee, I look forward to working with the committee to ensure that we continue to allow our police service to provide an excellent service for our communities.

15:30

**Paul Martin (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab):** In any debate on policing, it is important at the outset to acknowledge the important role that police officers play in ensuring community safety in all our communities. We learned in the Justice Committee inquiry that police officers show a great deal of commitment, sometimes in very difficult circumstances. It is important to put that on the record. It has been recognised that the inquiry was a useful opportunity to highlight constructively how we can improve local delivery of policing resources. I will refer to several key issues that the committee raised.

The committee recommended that community police officers should be in post for at least two years. It is fair to say that the lack of continuity of community police officers causes great concern in many communities throughout Scotland. In my experience as an elected representative for more than 15 years, the issue is one of the top five complaints that I receive from constituents. Communities realise that local police officers

should be given the opportunity to build relationships in communities and that such relationships are impossible if there is a high turnover of officers. Although we all accept that such decisions are for chief constables, it would be wrong of chief constables or the Scottish Government to ignore the legitimate concerns that communities throughout Scotland have raised.

**Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind):** Has Paul Martin checked on what the police feel about the issue? What does the Scottish Police Federation say?

**Paul Martin:** Anecdotal evidence that I hope all members have received indicates that police officers want continuity and that they understand the importance of stable relationships with communities. Officers being in post for at least two years would be a step in the right direction. The Justice Committee heard consistent evidence that a stable and continuing relationship is important. As the report states, many people accept that the high turnover of community police officers results in poor knowledge and a poor service to the public.

The Justice Committee discussed abstraction of police officers from our communities and the need for a policy to dictate a presumption against that. Although many chief constables, including Stephen House of Strathclyde Police, have said that they want to take steps to minimise abstraction of community police officers, doing so can sometimes be difficult, given competing demands for officers. I recently observed the policing operations during a Rangers and Celtic game at Ibrox football ground, at which it was clear that many of the 500 police officers had been abstracted from communities throughout the west of Scotland. Although we should accept that such events require police resources, it is important to accept that football clubs, for example, should be required to compensate police authorities properly for the time that police officers spend at events such as football games. Although the committee report does not go into detail on that issue, it is worth raising.

There can be no doubt that sharing good practice among police forces is the way forward. We heard about many examples of good practice in police forces. However, it is important to put on record that there was virtually no evidence on how good practice is shared among the forces. I would welcome a brief intervention from the cabinet secretary to assure us that good practice is being shared among police forces.

**Kenny MacAskill:** We have an inspectorate of constabulary to do just that, and which was established long before my tenure in office. The purpose of the inspectorate is to ensure that we have the opportunity for review and that good

practice is shared. That said, it is not simply a case of our forcing matters; the police should also be learning. I believe that that carrot-and-stick approach is working.

**Paul Martin:** We have learned during the inquiry that what is displayed in flowcharts and presentations does not necessarily work in practice locally. Although there is sometimes a tendency for police boards to be parochial, that is not exclusive to police boards and happens throughout civic life in Scotland. We have to ensure that we in Parliament show leadership to ensure that good practice is shared, so I welcome the minister's constructive intervention in that regard.

The committee recognised that there is scope for further research into where good practice can be shared, and also for taking more evidence on the effectiveness of the various policing models that are being developed throughout Scotland. We accept that one size does not fit all, and that there are examples of good practice that more effective independent research might develop.

The Government gave a commitment to deliver 1,000 more police officers than the 16,236 officers that it inherited in May 2007. We on the Labour benches will ensure that it is held to account on that promise. It is important to recognise that if our policing models are to be successful, the Government should be held to account on its commitment.

15:36

**John Lamont (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con):** The Scottish Conservatives welcome the Justice Committee's report on community policing and we congratulate the committee members on their work in producing it.

More police officers are needed in communities to provide a visible deterrent and to boost public confidence. Traditionally, communities in Scotland would have had the reassurance of a local police officer who was an integral part of their neighbourhood, building up relationships and reducing the fear of crime. In many areas, it is clear that that model does not bear much resemblance to what is happening on the ground, which is why it is important to develop a vision of what community policing means in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Like the Justice Committee, the Conservatives are reluctant for the Scottish Government to provide a strict definition of community policing. I therefore welcome the cabinet secretary's statement that he does not intend to micromanage what individual police forces are doing. It is important to recognise that in each police force, division, community and street, there will be a

different approach to community policing that should be adapted to meet the particular challenges and needs of that community. The needs of Glasgow are different to the needs of Shetland; equally, the needs of Hawick in my constituency are different from the needs of Gavinton, which is also in my constituency.

The role of community wardens was touched on in the committee report. The Scottish Conservatives have never denied that community wardens could have a role, but they should never be used as substitutes for real police officers. I spent a shift with the community wardens in Kelso several months ago and was able to see at first hand the valuable work that they do alongside the police. The community safety wardens in the Borders, like those in many other parts of Scotland, target specifically low-level crime and antisocial behaviour such as vandalism, graffiti and littering. It undoubtedly frees up police time to deal with more serious matters that require police powers.

Such has been the success of the community warden scheme in the Borders that the Conservative-led Scottish Borders Council has recently announced additional funding to extend the scheme to other parts of the Borders. However, we should be clear that our priority has always been to have more police officers walking the streets of Scotland. Although community wardens have an important role to play in making communities safer, they are not, and should not be viewed as, substitutes for or an alternative to recruiting additional police officers.

The Scottish Conservatives campaigned hard for additional police officers in Scotland and we won. We do not want to see officers sitting behind desks, dealing with paperwork; we want them out in our neighbourhoods, making our communities safer. We cannot start to talk about the effectiveness of community policing unless police officers are on the ground to perform the duties that we expect of them.

We agree with the Scottish Government that we need to retain serving officers, ensure that their time is used productively and free them up from needless paperwork, and we agree that we need to help police forces to work smarter. On top of that, we fought for additional new officers.

The Scottish Government has not always been as committed to the policy as we have been. It has twice U-turned on police recruitment. The SNP originally promised 1,000 more police in its 2007 election manifesto but, by the end of 2007, it had changed its mind and decided that the 1,000 new officers would be provided not only by additional recruitment, but by the creation of the ridiculous concept of equivalent police officers. We are pleased to have influenced the Scottish



Government's policy and we are happy to work with it to achieve yet another Scottish Conservative election manifesto commitment.

The other parties do not have much credibility on the issue. The previous Government had eight years to recruit the extra officers our forces desperately needed, but Labour did not promise a single extra police officer during the election campaign and the Lib Dems made just a token gesture.

**Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab):** In the eight years of the previous Administration, the police-strength figure increased by 1,500—that did not happen just through recruitment. Does the member accept that the Scottish Government should pledge to provide 1,000 extra officers on top of the police-strength figure?

**John Lamont:** I am sure that Mr Baker will acknowledge that crime rates also rose during those eight years, so we needed yet more additional police officers. The only party with any credibility on the issue is the Scottish Conservatives, who pledged to provide additional police.

**Cathie Craigie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab):** How can John Lamont say that the only party with credibility on the issue is the Conservative party? During the budget discussions in 2007 and 2008, the Conservatives made great play of the fact that they held out to secure additional police officers from the SNP. How does the member respond to the figures in a Government paper and the performance framework report that show an overall reduction in police numbers in 2007-08?

**John Lamont:** We have made it clear that we expect the Scottish Government to deliver 1,000 extra police officers in the four-year parliamentary session. We will hold it to account if it does not deliver that commitment to us and to the Parliament. The Government is clear about our commitment to that.

We welcome the Justice Committee's report and we look forward to listening to members' views.

15:42

**Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD):** As a recent recruit to the Justice Committee, I can claim credit only for signing off the final version of the report on community policing. The report is important and we can all agree with its conclusions. Professor Skogan defined community policing as involving "turf orientation"—a good phrase that means decentralising policing—and

"an extremely broad problem-solving view of the nature of the problems that they face" —[*Official Report, Justice Committee*, 20 May 2008; c 755.]

That is a good starting point.

I will begin by setting community policing in context. In an ideal world, all citizens would behave properly and respect their neighbours: 99 per cent of the public would not think—as a report in today's newspapers tells us—that alcohol has had a detrimental effect on their community, knives would stay in the kitchen cutlery drawer rather than be responsible for about 70 deaths a year in Scotland, and policemen would not be needed.

However, we do not live in an ideal world, so society, the Government and the police force have the job of keeping the public safe: locking up dangerous and violent people, dealing with the consequences of fractured families and the ravages of drug and alcohol addiction in damaged communities, and responding to the lower-level crime that has been such a nuisance in many areas.

We deal with such matters first by various social interventions and at the end by various attempts to rehabilitate individuals or at least to protect public safety. The glue in the middle is the police service—not least the policing that connects to and engages with the community.

Community policing has been the police's central task since the first police force was established by Sir Robert Peel in London back in 1829. Initially, the police had some problems. The first police officer, with the police number 1, lasted only four hours before he was sacked for getting legless. Of the first 2,800 recruits, only 600 lasted the pace. The public thought that the police were a sinister foreign idea that was designed to create an apparatus to lock up the Government's opponents. I do not want to give the cabinet secretary ideas in connection with his alcohol strategy, but that is the view that was taken.

**Bill Butler (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab):** Is Robert Brown saying that, historically speaking, Lord Liverpool was a liberal?

**Robert Brown:** I am not saying that at all—I am describing the origin of community policing.

Another interesting point is that the first police officers' uniforms were blue because the police were modelled on the patriotically popular Royal Navy, rather than the more disreputable Army. They also had tall hats that they could stand on to look over walls. That was a practical technological solution of the day.

Things have come on a bit since then. When I visited the Scottish Police College at Tulliallan last week, I was told by the director that no one from the last round of recruits had dropped out. That says a great deal about the motivation, training and preparation of today's police recruits. I was

impressed by the quality of the recruits whom I met at Tulliallan on that occasion.

I picked up one or two other interesting points. The first was the emphasis that is put on greeting people and looking them in the eye. It sounds like a silly point, but all police recruits are trained to say good morning to people whom they meet, to visitors, and to police officers and colleagues. That is regarded as the first step towards engagement with the public on the proper basis of respect, and it helps recruits to be observant of what is happening around them.

The second point was the emphasis that is now placed on diversity training—the recognition of the diverse nature of modern society and the equality of all citizens before the law. The third point, which is echoed in the Justice Committee's report, is that specific training in community policing seems to be left largely to local forces, with their different needs and requirements. Development will be required in that area by the Scottish Police College, the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland and local forces.

I cannot speak about other forces, but Strathclyde Police at least seems to be fully engaged with the priority of community policing. It is building on existing good practice and the developing idea of problem-solving policing, which has existed for a while. The reduction of numbers in the senior ranks and the recruitment of new police officers—even if it is lagging a bit behind the 1,000 officers target—have freed up resources to employ and, importantly, to deploy more community officers. Structural reorganisation has put a huge emphasis on the central position of community policing. The cabinet secretary quoted the figures for that.

In recent months, and for different purposes, I have met the local police in Govanhill, Rutherglen and Glasgow city centre, where the picture is broadly the same. In truth, many of us were fairly sceptical. We had heard repeated complaints about there being only two police officers to cover a district, about police cars flashing by in one direction while yobs fled in another, and about community officers lasting only months before being seconded elsewhere, not to be replaced. They were thought of like the disappeared in some Latin American dictatorship.

The situation has changed in many respects. I say to John Lamont that a little humility from the Conservatives might be helpful, because many of the problems that I have described, including those relating to the direction of travel of police cars, arose under the previous Conservative Government. A bit of perspective on such matters is required.

The roll-out of the community policing strategy seems to be paying dividends. I have the impression that some of the long-standing crime hotspots that I recollect from my days as a councillor are at last becoming a bit too hot for some local troublemakers. We are arriving at a point where community officers have the potential to stay in post for at least two years, as the committee recommends, with abstractions kept to a minimum. One problem is that many officers are new recruits who do not have depth of experience. That will need to be managed over time.

Non-reporting of crime is a problem at various levels. It is important to note the disparity between reported assaults and the substantially higher number of people who attend hospitals with wounds, and the lower levels of reporting of crimes—for a range of reasons—in more troubled areas. Community police officers can be a key resource in raising levels of reporting of crime.

I am told that there is a fuzzy area and that incidents can get sidetracked to antisocial behaviour teams, instead of being dealt with by the police. That may be all right, but it may mean citizens not having the police protection to which they are entitled. It would be helpful if the Minister for Community Safety would take cognisance of the point, which was made to me in recent discussions with Victim Support Scotland, and ensure that there is, in effect, a seamless overlap between community policing on the one hand and local authority antisocial behaviour strategies on the other.

The concept of community policing has a long history. For a time, it was in decline due to the lure of motorised support teams and the delusion that modern communications could replace the physical presence of police officers on the beat. Community policing is back. The Justice Committee has produced a worthwhile report that will be a template for future action in this key area.

15:49

**Stuart McMillan (West of Scotland) (SNP):** It seems a long time since the Justice Committee published its report, but it was only last October. As I was perusing its pages in preparation for the debate, all the memories came flooding back. Once again, the Justice Committee has produced an important piece of work that will aid both Parliament and external bodies. Members do not have to agree with every word in the report, but it provides a firm foundation on which to build future policy decisions.

As has been highlighted, the Justice Committee's inquiry into community policing emanated from its work on the roles and responsibilities of the police. During that earlier

inquiry, it became apparent that community policing is a somewhat strange beast, given its various titles and the various nuances of what it means, so the committee decided to look into the matter and try to clarify it. Visits were arranged to Dundee, the Borders and Motherwell, and the committee held evidence sessions, including a session via satellite with Professor Wesley Skogan from Chicago. I can only say that the committee examined the issue in great detail and came to its conclusions in an informed manner.

As well going on the committee's visits, I spent some time going out with Strathclyde Police in Greenock and East Dunbartonshire and with community wardens in Inverclyde. I also met the community partnership team in East Dunbartonshire. Those additional visits allowed me to have more detailed discussions with the officers and wardens, and they certainly helped me during the inquiry.

It became apparent early on that there is no one-size-fits-all definition of community policing. Communities and their needs differ, as does the geography in different parts of Scotland. What might be good for Greenock or Motherwell may well be inadequate for Peebles or Arran. That was highlighted to the committee by Chief Superintendent Val McHoull of the Association of Scottish Police Superintendents, who made it clear that she is not convinced that imposing a nationally defined model is the most effective way in which to move the community policing structure forward. As she pointed out, community police officers are

"there to understand their community".—[*Official Report, Justice Committee*, 3 June 2008; c 854.]

If they are to do that competently, it is essential that they have some flexibility within their area.

Paddy Tomkins, Her Majesty's chief inspector of constabulary for Scotland, takes a similar view. Unconvinced by the neighbourhood policing model in England and Wales, he appreciates the diversity in Scotland and the merits of developing a less uniform model. I echo those sentiments in my thoughts about any future community policing model in Scotland.

Regardless of whether we were discussing rural or urban areas, we heard about two issues loud and clear: abstraction rates and the tenure of community police officers. It became clear that abstractions are commonplace. In some instances, there is a feeling that community police officers are not as valued as other officers and that they are therefore the first to be called from their duties to perform other tasks. I suggest that community policing is actually one of the most important aspects of policing because it allows the police force to have a public face in communities

and to build up links, trust and—dare I say it?—even friendships. Witnessing the rapport that community police officers have with members of the public proved to me that the simple activity of talking to the public can play a vital role in community relations. Furthermore, the more trust that can be built between the police and communities, the more mutual assistance can be provided.

There will of course be occasions when abstractions from front-line community policing cannot be helped. There may be a major disaster or even a terrorist attack. However, abstractions should be the exception rather than the rule. Paragraph 159 of the report notes Strathclyde Police's approach, with the red-circling of community police officers. That is an important development, but it will be some time before it is fully implemented and we can say whether it works. However, I believe that the will and the desire for red-circling exist, and I expect that this new approach will be beneficial in Strathclyde Police's area. I am sure that problems will arise and that it will not be all plain sailing, but in time the change of mindset will benefit our communities.

The second issue of note that I will touch on is the tenure of community police officers. I was surprised that there appears to be no rhyme nor reason for the time that a police officer spends in the community. Furthermore, community policing appears to be the first step on the ladder in the police force. It became apparent that if community policing is to work, then a standard approach to tenure is needed.

I appreciate that an officer's tenure is an operational matter and that the power to change the current approach lies outwith Parliament. That is quite right, but it would be remiss of members not to highlight in our inquiry areas of note or concern for other people to consider. The committee's recommendations that there should be training at national level and that there should be a minimum tenure of two years in community policing are based on all the evidence that we heard, and their aim is to offer a solution on a matter that we all regard as being an important part of policing in Scotland.

I have no doubt that community policing benefits everyone. To judge from the visits that I have made in the West of Scotland region, the approach works. As is the case with other initiatives, stumbling blocks will be ironed out in due course, to create an enhanced service that brings about the safer Scotland that we all want.

15:55

**Cathie Craigie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth (Lab)):** Time is short, as usual. I echo the convener's thanks to everyone who took part in the Justice Committee's inquiry.

I am sure that members who are not on the committee will have gathered that after considering a large amount of evidence the committee found that community policing is a good thing. I think the public agree with us. If community policing is a good thing, it should be supported and resourced, and officers should be allowed to get to know the areas and communities that they serve. I am sure that there is little disagreement on that and I ask members to support the committee's findings.

I take the opportunity to share with members the recent work of the police who serve the community that I represent. Last Friday, Cumbernauld and Kilsyth witnessed a successful example of what community policing can provide. There was a day of action, as part of operation fleet, which is the biggest-ever police and community partnership initiative in Cumbernauld and Kilsyth and the surrounding district. Some 370 local and special officers from Strathclyde Police joined forces with partner agencies in a bid to crack down on violence, disorder and antisocial behaviour in my constituency.

Operation fleet produced impressive results. Five people were arrested for posing with offensive weapons on internet sites and encouraging people to join them in violent acts; 16 people were arrested under warrant; and 21 people were arrested for offences such as carrying an offensive weapon and assault. There were 228 visits to licensed premises to ensure compliance with licensing laws, and I am pleased to say that no offences were detected. Officers, including members of the newly formed domestic abuse task force, carried out curfew and domestic bail checks, and undertook visits to reassure vulnerable victims of crime.

Partnership working was crucial to operation fleet's success. I welcome the cabinet secretary's acknowledgement that community policing cannot work in isolation from organisations that are committed to delivering stronger and safer communities for everyone. In Cumbernauld and Kilsyth, the hard work of partners such as North Lanarkshire Council, the Antonine Centre, Tesco, Asda and the British Transport Police has enabled officers to take a vital and visible approach.

The success of operation fleet depended on powers in the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003 and the Antisocial Behaviour etc (Scotland) Act 2004, which were introduced by the Labour Executive. The use of tools that have been

provided in legislation that the Parliament passed to protect communities and to give power to the police has made a difference to the quality of life in communities that are plagued by antisocial behaviour. In particular, the powers that have been granted to police to close premises that are the focus of constant antisocial behaviour and to disperse groups of people who are involved in serious and significant antisocial behaviour greatly assist community officers in the provision of visible policing and the targeting of outstanding matters.

What did the public think about that? I am imagining what members think about it and the problem with abstractions that we highlighted in the report. Obviously, officers had to be brought in from other police divisions for the operation, but the public had police visibility on the streets. I have to say that huge rumours were going round the community about murders, rapes and people absconding, but because of operational details the police could not share information with the public before the event.

It is imperative for the Scottish Government to build on the actions that were taken by previous Administrations and Parliaments and to continue to equip police forces with the tools that they need to deliver community policing. The cabinet secretary—I am sorry that he is not here—spoke today about “a basket of measures”, but in the previous Parliament, we recognised that what was needed was a box of tools and we gave different tools for different areas. I just hope that the cabinet secretary's basket can cope as well as the heavy box of tools that we gave, and that there is the same commitment.

Resources are paramount in ensuring that there is community policing in my area of Cumbernauld and Kilsyth and elsewhere in Scotland. Effective, publicly supported community policing on a day-to-day basis in North Lanarkshire is successful because of financial support and collaborative working across a number of areas, such as housing wardens, the antisocial task force and graffiti removal, benefiting communities through a reduction in crime and, I hope, fear of crime.

Community policing, working in partnership with local organisations, grants areas such as Cumbernauld and Kilsyth better and more responsive services. The recommendations of the Justice Committee's inquiry seek to improve community policing, and I look forward to seeing how the Government will continue to support officers in providing what most people regard as the most important aspect of operational policing.

In his speech, Mr MacAskill mentioned the increase in police numbers and referred to the unprecedented police numbers in the Strathclyde region. I am glad that the previous Labour-led Executive left that legacy. However, that

unprecedented number has risen by two since the cabinet secretary took power. I hope that he will address that.

16:02

**Andrew Welsh (Angus) (SNP):** I congratulate the Justice Committee on its report on community policing and the evidence that it gathered from throughout Scotland. The idea of community policing has at its heart the wish to encourage local action to meet local needs, and to regenerate identity and renew a sense of community. However, the context is a society in which, sadly, rural community policing has been weakened by the closure of even large village police stations and the use of police cars, lack of local knowledge and a reduction in regular and consistent public contact with the police. In cities, newspapers daily carry news about a catalogue of crimes that should shock society into action to address what is a complex situation.

Police forces cannot act effectively in isolation from the people they serve. Our police cannot create secure crime-free areas without contact and interaction with, and information and support from, the local community they serve. However, there is a problem in our modern society. There is no fear of God, no fear of the police, no respect for the police uniform, no fear of law courts and no shame in imprisonment. Everyone seems to know their individual rights, but we rarely hear of individual obligations or duties as individuals to our wider society. We turn up at hospitals and demand to be cured, irrespective of the damage that we have done to ourselves, with an attitude of, "By the way, if you make a mistake, we'll sue you."

Small numbers of disruptive or criminally minded individuals can cause their neighbours and communities misery. The fundamental problem is a selfish society in which fear now rules in fundamental social situations. For example, teachers feel vulnerable, and there was the case of the man who tried, understandably, to stop youngsters vandalising his wife's car but who ended up dead. Today's policing has to take place in that kind of atmosphere.

Our police forces cannot be responsible for curing all the ills of our society, but they can, while protecting our citizens, add great value to the self-awareness and sense of wellbeing and identity within local communities by co-operating with a range of organisations. There must be interaction involving a whole range of local organisations and institutions to ensure that there is a comprehensive and organised response to this complex problem.

Community policing means a highly visible police presence, with police working with the

community. I commend to Parliament the work that has been done in Angus and elsewhere by Sheriff Norrie Stein and the Community Alcohol Free Environment project, which has been successful in involving young people and giving them responsibility for running the project. CAFE's street football for all project has been extended to include international competitions. Its highly flexible mobile units can be set up anywhere. The games are based on fair play rules and are open to all participants equally. I have also seen at first hand the Bank of Scotland midnight football leagues, in which policemen and policewomen work with local youngsters. Trust and positive conduct are built up through contact and by example.

Our police cannot solve all of society's problems on their own, but I thoroughly recommend operation Inchcape, whereby the community task force created a highly visible police presence in Arbroath. The police worked with the local community safety partnership and a range of other local organisations—including the national health service, community wardens and parents—to target and reduce youth crime and drug misuse. Practical models for positive action do exist.

I congratulate the Justice Committee on its identification of the way forward. I welcome paragraph 44 of the committee's report, which includes a statement about the

"need to clarify what is understood by Community Policing and to develop more coherent community policing strategies which will embrace emerging developments in problem solving, the National Intelligence Model (NIM), restorative justice, warden schemes and the partnership elements of Community Planning."

However, I note the warning in paragraph 46 about the "uneven picture across Scotland". That comment should be a challenge to us in implementing improvements.

The committee's report is absolutely correct to highlight

"the continuing challenge of meeting reactive resource and operational demands"

and the need for

"a stronger bias towards proactive crime prevention and problem solving".

In warning against a one-size-fits-all model, the report rightly recognises the need for flexibility to reflect and adapt positively to local community needs. The summation in paragraph 72 again hits the mark. We need

"visible, accessible officers in the community, who are there not just to attend community meetings and run youth initiatives but to deal with crime in their area ... to understand their community ... It is about early intervention and crime reduction."

Ultimately, the matter is simple and straightforward. For emergency situations, the public need to know how to contact the police to ensure that there is a response and action. People who are affected by criminal or antisocial situations need to be able to communicate their needs. We need to pin down those whose conduct causes harassment, harm, hurt or loss to others. In the medium and longer term, we need positive and consistent community interaction, such as has happened in the CAFE project and under the operation Inchcape banner. We can provide positive alternatives and change lives through combined action by those who uphold the law. Community organisations, health providers and other community services must all be linked with a strong, visible and locally interactive police force.

I thank the members of the Justice Committee for their work in gathering the evidence and I congratulate them on their report.

16:09

**James Kelly (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab):** I welcome the opportunity to take part in this debate. Like others, I compliment the Justice Committee on its report. There is no doubt that an extensive and comprehensive piece of work has been produced by the experienced members of the committee. When I attended a recent meeting of the committee for a constituency matter, I saw the committee's work at first hand and was very impressed by members' knowledge of justice matters. That knowledge has been brought to bear in the report.

For many of us, at our constituency offices and surgeries issues of crime and antisocial behaviour continue to dominate. Only last night, I was contacted by a constituent who was frightened to leave her house because of criminal activity and antisocial behaviour in her local community. In Cambuslang last week, while council workers were attempting to clear the local bandstand, they came under attack from local youths. In the face of such incidents, the increasing presence of community police officers will help. As Cathie Craigie said, there is no doubt that they are a good thing. They are essential in our communities, and people are looking for them to be visible and to provide reassurance and stability for our communities.

A number of aspects of the Justice Committee report can be implemented to strengthen community policing. It is important that training at the Scottish Police College is enhanced by ensuring that it includes modules on community policing. There is no doubt that community policing is a different kind of police work. As Stuart McMillan noted, speaking to the public requires skill. Community police officers have to speak to

different groups, such as younger and older people, and to build up support and confidence in the community. To be able to do that, community police officers must be trained up. In addition, as the report states, it is important that middle and senior-ranking officers are also trained so that they understand the importance of community policing and how it can be used to combat crime and minimise its impact on communities.

I note the report's comments on the delivery of community policing in multimember wards, which make a lot of sense. Many communities and their services are in multimember wards, and community groups and other organisations can identify with their local community police officers.

I support the report's comments and the comments of members, including Paul Martin, about the tenure of community police officers. That issue is raised with me regularly in Rutherglen and Cambuslang. When community police officers are appointed, there is a learning curve. They have to learn the job, establish themselves within the community and win the confidence of different groups. Sometimes, once that process has been completed and the officer has settled in, they are moved to another post, which results in some instability in the community and the whole confidence-building process having to begin again. I therefore support the proposal for a minimum tenure of two years. I understand that that is an operational matter, but, on balance, the needs of the community are better served by community police officers who serve for at least two years.

On the issue of police numbers, the committee notes the importance of resources. The Scottish National Party's stated objective is to go from 16,236 to 17,236 police officers, and the Parliament will monitor that closely. The Government might have difficulty with that policy, because it has not thought it through and considered the number of retirements, which will be in excess of 600. Resources need to account for that if we are to reach the target of 1,000 additional officers.

I commend the committee for its work in raising the profile of community policing, which, when used effectively, can provide reassurance to Scotland's communities and help to combat crime and antisocial behaviour. I support the committee's conclusions.

16:15

**Michael Matheson (Falkirk West) (SNP):** Like other members, I thank the Justice Committee for the important work that it has done in its inquiry. A significant body of evidence has already highlighted the importance of community policing and the benefits that it brings, but the committee's

report adds weight to the argument that effective community policing can be extremely valuable.

I recently made an interesting visit to a school in my constituency, during which I was quizzed on my role as an MSP—I am sure that other members have had the same experience. I took the opportunity to ask the youngsters what career they were thinking of following. It was clear that my answers to their questions did not have much bearing on their career choices, because none of them indicated that they had any desire to go into politics or to be an MSP. However, several of them said that they were interested in becoming a police officer. When I pressed them on the type of policing that they would like to get involved in, one pupil said that they would like to work in Strathclyde Police's helicopter, another said that they would like to drive the fast police cars of the traffic division, and another said that he would like to be an undercover officer in the drugs squad. All those jobs are much more exciting than being an MSP, of course, but it is interesting that none of the pupils mentioned that they were interested in being a community police officer.

I recognise that, as Robert Brown said, policing is much more sophisticated and high tech than it was when officers stood on tall hats to see over walls—that has been overtaken by the use of closed-circuit television and other sophisticated forms of surveillance, including high-tech helicopters. Despite what kids see on TV and the availability of such sophisticated equipment, in my view the core purpose of policing has not changed. Community policing is as valuable as ever; arguably, it is more important in today's society than it has ever been. It is often forgotten that the intelligence that allows the drugs squad to undertake high-tech surveillance operations in communities or the transport division to bring in the helicopter in support of its work is frequently obtained through the local community police officer.

The committee's report has highlighted a number of important issues that impact on the effectiveness of community policing. Constituents constantly raise with me the issue of abstraction, whereby community officers, who are meant to be dedicated to a specific area, are seconded to work in other areas on particular projects that might be the flavour of the month. When I sit down with senior officers in Central Scotland Police, they often reassure me about their personal commitment to community policing and how much they value it, but I know from experience that community police officers are often seen as a soft target when it comes to pulling officers off their normal duties and putting them on to others. We must ensure that we address that attitude in policing, when it is possible to do so, so that the important role that community policing can and

does play is not just paid lip service but is recognised in practical terms.

That leads me on to tenure. I agree that it is necessary to provide greater security of tenure for community officers who are allocated to a specific area, regardless of whether it is a multimember ward. Central Scotland Police used to have the objective of keeping community officers in the same area for 18 months, but I know from conversations with members of that force that community officers might move on to other areas after nine months or a year. If we do not provide greater security of tenure for community police officers, we undermine their ability to develop their skills and their knowledge of their areas. They have to be given a good length of time to work in the communities that they serve.

I acknowledge that we are talking about operational matters, but I hope that ministers will give greater direction where they can. They should emphasise to chief constables that they should address the issues if they can.

When constituents come to me about policing issues, they are not looking for major surveillance operations or big fancy community operations; they are looking for police officers who will be part of the local fabric and will work effectively with tenants associations and community councils. They do not want the police to be regarded as a group of individuals who sit in the local police station and turn up in their police cars only when an incident occurs. They want their community police officers to be seen working in the community outwith the times when they are called on to perform specific duties. They want the officers to turn up at community council meetings, to meet tenants associations and to work with youth clubs. Such proactive work is valuable, but it is undermined if the officers are unable to work regularly in the same area.

Effective community policing is policing that is seen to be part of the local community's fabric. Reaching that point takes time and effort. When the Minister for Community Safety addresses the Justice Committee's report, I hope that he will refer to extending the length of time for which officers are allowed to serve in communities.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan):** We move now to the wind-up speeches. I ask members to stick to their time limits as there is business before decision time. I call Mike Pringle. You have six minutes.

16:21

**Mike Pringle (Edinburgh South) (LD):** Community policing represents a massive opportunity, not only to reduce crime but, crucially, to reduce the fear of crime that blights many of

Scotland's communities. It is because of that potential that I welcome today's debate and the Justice Committee's report.

The committee's critique and recommendations provide a valuable framework for progress. The report tackles in detail the vast majority of issues that currently affect community policing, and it tackles several known problems, such as police forces' reliance on abstraction, and the service tenure of community officers. In response to Margo MacDonald's intervention, Paul Martin said that community police officers did not want to be abstracted, which is absolutely right. In my experience, both as a councillor and as an MSP, police officers who want to be community police officers do not want to be running around policing football matches and so on; they want to be in the community.

A key aspect of the community police officer's role must be the building of relationships with community residents and other partners, in order to foster mutual understanding and trust. I agree with Bill Aitken that communities also want to know their officer's name—they want to know who he is. Is he Mike Pringle, John Jones or whoever? Communities want their officer to have an identity. However, as the Strathclyde example that is featured in the report shows, fostering understanding and trust may simply not be possible with a short-term appointment. I wholeheartedly agree with the principle behind the report's recommendation of a minimum tenure for community officers.

As Bill Aitken, the cabinet secretary and others have said, police forces must make the cap fit in deploying community officers. Stuart McMillan and Michael Matheson spoke about abstraction. Michael Matheson—who spoke just before me and spoke very well—said that community police officers were often the first to be abstracted. That might depend on senior officers' views of community officers. In my constituency, senior officers have shown real commitment to reducing abstraction as much as possible.

It seems that community policing also suffers from its own flexibility: because of its local basis, it lacks the joined-up thinking that is required for its effectiveness at a national level. If effectiveness is to be improved, it is vital that knowledge is shared between Government, police governing bodies and community officers. If that is to be achieved, communication must improve. The balance is delicate. Taking too top down an approach risks damaging the valuable local flexibility that community policing provides, although that does not take away from the need for further national co-ordination.

On that point, I come to what I believe are the report's two most important aspects—the twin

themes of greater Government engagement and national co-ordination.

It is vital to establish what exactly we are trying to achieve at a national level. I fully endorse the committee's recommendation that the Government take an active role in ensuring that forces meet their community policing obligations. However, for that to happen, an accountability structure must be put in place. One way of achieving that would be for each police board to publish an annual community policing plan in co-ordination with community officers, antisocial behaviour teams, community wardens and council staff, setting out how it will deploy existing and additional officers. That local knowledge could then be used to inform a national training programme in line with the Justice Committee's recommendations. In a thought-provoking speech, Andrew Welsh referred to the police and other organisations working together. I believe that that is essential.

I have been impressed by two examples in my constituency of working with the police. One is the launch by Lothian and Borders Police A division of the Edinburgh community safety partnership take control strategy, which is a citywide joint venture between Lothian and Borders Police, the City of Edinburgh Council and voluntary organisations to tackle hate crime. There is also value in using community-based thinking to run well-informed local operations. The planned week of action that Lothian and Borders Police A division has organised in partnership with the City of Edinburgh Council, the south central neighbourhood partnership and local community councils, with the aim of tackling not only crime but its underlying causes, promises to be quite successful.

Nonetheless, if police boards are to be accountable to Government, Government must provide the resources that are necessary to make improvements. The committee has recommended that 1,000 new police officers be provided, in line with the Government's 2007 election pledge. However, since that promise was made, exactly how many more officers the Government is providing has become a little unclear. I am glad, therefore, that the minister has today made it much clearer that he and the Government are committed to those 1,000 extra police officers.

At the 2007 election, the Scottish Liberal Democrats also made a commitment that, if elected, we would provide 1,000 more police officers. We continue to stand by that commitment. We would have provided at least two additional community police officers in every ward in every council area in the country. With 353 wards, that would have meant 706 new local community police officers in total, which is well within the target of an increase of 1,000.



In its report, the Justice Committee has effectively laid down a blueprint identifying what can be achieved through community policing. The Government must now provide the officers and the resources so that the potential to which many members have referred can be achieved. That is what our communities want from us politicians.

16:27

**Jackson Carlaw (West of Scotland) (Con):** As might have been anticipated, this has been a constructive debate on a substantial and measured committee report, the conclusions of which—as my colleague, John Lamont, has confirmed—we are happy to endorse. I pay tribute to the splendid leadership of the convener and his colleagues. It was with studied relish that Mr Aitken acknowledged the cabinet secretary's endorsement of the report's recommendations.

For me, this afternoon brings the added pleasure of straying from my health brief. I last participated in a justice debate some time earlier in the session and it is appropriate, in a debate on community policing, to acknowledge my astonishment at the absence of a central plank from the Government's contribution today. Back in that earlier debate, a new word entered the lexicon of parliamentary life. It was a word around which the whole measure of Government policy was to be based. It was a word over which both the cabinet secretary and Mr Ewing salivated, yet it is gone, disappeared from public life. I refer, of course, to "equivalents"—that mighty division of illusory police officers who were to substitute for the real thing.

I recall being chastised by Mr Ewing in that earlier debate for allegedly deploying dodgy car-selling techniques from my previous occupation to justify the need to fund an additional 1,000 police officers. Yet, under the weight of the argument and the spirited, decisive force of Conservative pressure, Mr Ewing and the Government performed a spectacular U-turn. Equivalents were abandoned and Scotland was promised the 1,000 officers it needed, which should now be—and are being—realised.

The moral of the story is that Mr Ewing has harboured ambitions to be a car salesman himself. For, in the end, he promised Scotland what he then called dodgy car sales financials. Will he and the cabinet secretary deliver? This cannot and must not become another pledge unfulfilled. At the heart of effective community policing are police officers in the community. I assure Mr Ewing that, were the Government to slacken and such a career move to prove necessary for him at some future date, with my experience of the motor industry to hand I could put in a good word for him and attest without reservation that here is a man

who possesses such qualities that no used car—however soiled or dodgy—would ever be left unsold by him.

The Government must fulfil its commitment. It is no good waffling on about the challenge that such a commitment presents. Governments are elected and ministers are appointed to overcome successfully the challenges with which they are presented. If they cannot do that, they go—that is the remedy.

I congratulate the cabinet secretary on what has to be the most charming and consensual contribution that I have heard him make to date. So out of character was his manner that I began to wonder whether his tongue was firmly in his cheek. Indeed, when I heard him use the word "twee" I almost believed that I was hearing the fulfilment of a lifetime's ambition, as tweeness is most certainly not a sentiment with which I would generally associate the cabinet secretary. I do not want to be uncharitable, however, so I welcome the cabinet secretary's comments at face value and look forward to the same charm and energy being deployed as he seeks to drive forward the recommendations.

Robert Brown gave us a history lesson that covered ground familiar to those of us who watched Channel 4's recent drama series on Henry Fielding's early attempts to establish a London police force. I was slightly struck by Mr Brown's bizarre notion that police officers were somehow magnificently transferred into cars under the previous Conservative Government. I think that he was confused and was actually paying tribute to the rapid expansion of new technology under that previous Conservative Government. In any event, "Z Cars" was a creation of the 1960s, not the 1990s.

More soberly, Andrew Welsh made a notable and passionate speech that detailed much of the public concern that provides the context for this community policing report.

Against the context of a properly resourced police force, Scottish Conservatives accept the additional contribution of an incremental network of community wardens. They have a role, and John Lamont reminded us of the contribution that he has seen them make in the Borders. We agree with the Government that the resource can be further enhanced by ensuring the productive use of officers' time by absolving them of needless paperwork requirements. That is not to be too prescriptive. The conclusion of the committee that there would be limited benefit in providing a strict definition of community policing is one with which we concur, and we accept the belief that flexibility is key. Bill Aitken and Stuart McMillan both talked about that.

The report's conclusions include a detailing of community policing principles that is a roster of common sense, if I may say so. The conclusions on scrutiny, terminology, tenure and the need to make community policing professionally rewarding to officers, which was highlighted by Michael Matheson, all enjoy our support.

We note the strategy of Strathclyde Police regarding abstractions and wish it well—I note, however, the cautionary, practical point that Paul Martin made. We applaud the commitment of Strathclyde Police to providing a training course that will be tailored to community policing, the importance of which was touched on by James Kelly.

We have recognised the crucial role that successful community engagement will play, and the desirability of ensuring the sharing of best practice as well as evaluating outcomes, and we urge the Government to ensure that others, in addition to the police forces, consider that.

Now that all is said and done—the committee report endorsed, welcomed and so on—I return to the glue that will hold it together: a properly resourced police force within which are the 1,000 additional police officers that were promised and conceded at our instigation. There can be no substitute; there must be no return of equivalence. A successful community police force will stand or fall on that commitment being fulfilled and I invite the minister to reaffirm, without qualification, that it will be.

16:33

**Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab):**

Once again, Parliament is indebted to the Justice Committee for a thorough and considered report. Community policing is not just about that long-held ideal of a local bobby who knows their patch; all of us in this chamber know that the communities that we represent want visible policing that is responsive to their needs and is aware of the particular challenges of crime and antisocial behaviour that they face. That is why, across this chamber, there is a common desire for extra police. We will debate the progress of the Scottish Government towards that later, but that goal is there because we know that our communities want there to be effective strategies for visible community-based policing. Members across the chamber have made that point well in what has been a good debate.

Communities want strong and well resourced community policing because it works. In my area of Grampian, the dedication by the police of resources to specific geographical areas that have been experiencing particular problems has resulted in impressive reductions in crime and

antisocial behaviour. The committee found different levels of activity on community policing in different forces, and it is right that the committee has recommended that there be a greater emphasis on the development of community policing strategies in all forces. It is clear from the evidence that the committee heard that, although Strathclyde Police and Central Scotland Police have developed detailed plans for community policing, other forces are still in the process of doing so. Everyone, no matter where they are in Scotland, should be able to expect effective community policing to be given the same strong priority in their area that it is given in other areas.

The Scottish Government has responded to that with the Scottish policing engagement principles, and it rightly points out that much of the delivery will involve local operational decisions being taken by forces. They will have to strike a balance between the capacity for response and specialised policing, for which there will always be a need, and the requirement for greater community policing. As Michael Matheson pointed out, the people that we meet are focused on the desire for more local police.

It is reasonable to say that, although there should not be central direction of each force's community policing strategy, ministers who are working with police boards and authorities have a role in ensuring that all forces are putting in place their broad definition of community policing; ensuring that all forces are doing their best to minimise abstraction—community police officers should not always be the first to be abstracted to other duties; and, at the very least, sending out a clear signal that a two-year minimum tenure—to which Paul Martin referred—is desirable.

It is important that best practice is shared and that, as initiatives such as those in Strathclyde are rolled out, those experiences are evaluated and taken up as successful examples for other forces to use. Training—as James Kelly mentioned—is crucial if community policing is to be given the priority for which we have all expressed a desire today. That should include training of new recruits and of more senior officers who will be responsible for ensuring that there is a focus within their force on community policing. There have been capacity issues within the police college, and ministers have a role in ensuring that the right resources are available to allow new recruits and existing officers to receive proper training in community policing.

The Scottish Government has promised research into the impact of community policing, and the timescale for that is important, as it is for all the responses to the committee's report. I would like ministers to outline when they expect those actions to be achieved.

The committee's definition of community policing refers to resources and, although the Scottish Government's definition does not, we must realise that resourcing is key. The cabinet secretary, in his letter to the committee, outlines the Scottish Government's pledge to recruit 1,000 extra officers. Like Cathie Craigie, I am afraid that that I cannot share the unusual optimism of the Tory members, and the straying Jackson Carlaw, on that issue. The letter does not give us confidence that the pledge is on track and that the police strength figures—the crucial indicator—will rise by 1,000. That figure—not the figure for recruitment—rose by 1,500 while we were in office, providing record police numbers. I am happy to inform John Lamont that there were also sharp decreases in crime rates during that time.

The ministers must reassure us that overall police numbers will now increase by 1,000. In reality, however, a postcode lottery is developing in relation to the police recruitment pledge. In Strathclyde, the local authority has recruited 200 extra officers for community policing, but it has had to fund that itself, rather than use funds from central Government.

In my area, Grampian Police—having had record recruitment levels during the previous session of Parliament—has had to scale back its recruitment target by some 60 officers. Half of that reduction is due to the pensions shortfall. It is crucial that the police numbers promise is kept for all Scotland. That promise is central to the Government's pledge on community policing, and it cannot be allowed to go the way of local income tax, student debt and class sizes, to name but a few other pledges.

We want progress on community policing, and the report by the Justice Committee shows how that can be achieved. If the Scottish Government does back the report and deliver on police recruitment, our communities will feel and be better protected from crime.

16:39

**The Minister for Community Safety (Fergus Ewing):** The Justice Committee is to be congratulated on the solid piece of work that it has produced. We have responded to it in a positive way, and this afternoon we have had—almost exclusively—an extremely positive and useful debate. It occurred to me that, until Jackson Carlaw got to his feet, we were about as close to a love-in as we are ever likely to get in a Scottish Parliament debate on justice issues. I do not think I can take up Mr Carlaw's suggestion of a future as a car salesman, not least because if I were ever asked what my previous job was, it might undermine any potential transactions.

We need to acknowledge that everyone has the right to feel safe in their community. Promoting community safety and tackling antisocial behaviour are and always will be top priorities for the Government. When the cabinet secretary opened the debate, he defined the approach that we are taking to community policing and outlined the good and solid progress that we are making towards fulfilling our manifesto pledge of 1,000 additional police. He outlined the support of £32.8 million that we have provided to the police to fund the additional costs in the pension commutation rates. He also set a tableau that, although it did not use the word equivalents—not a word that rolls readily off my tongue, I say to Mr Carlaw—made a solid statement of the success that we see thanks to the good efforts of all those who are involved in our police service and in law enforcement.

We have heard a great deal about the role of the police in making communities safer. I will touch on the work of some others who help to make our communities safer and who, although they are not police officers themselves, play a role in community policing. For example, I recently met representatives of the Perth street pastors. They are volunteers from churches who offer help to late-night city-centre revellers and are on hand to provide advice, solace, counselling and blankets; they provide flip-flops to ladies who may have lost their normal foot apparel and arrange taxis for those who are too inebriated to find their way home.

That work is humorous in one sense, but it is serious because it helps the police. The street pastors work in tandem with the police and, before they go out of an evening, communicate with them to say where they are going. They also report to the police any incidents that occur or are likely to occur.

People should also consider applying to serve as special constables. I welcome the proposal that Mike Russell made recently when he was Minister for Environment that gamekeepers and other estate workers should be encouraged to join the special constabulary. As I know from my constituency, they often have unique and unparalleled local knowledge of wildlife and, along with guides and rangers from our national parks, are ideal candidates to be special constables.

**Members:** Hear, hear.

**Fergus Ewing:** Those are exciting new developments that, I can see, are welcome in parts of the chamber. They are only two examples. I also refer to the work that is done by the likes of community wardens—whom John Lamont mentioned when he described his work, on the back shift I presume, in Kelso—neighbourhood watch, the safer streets campaign, Crimestoppers, community safety partnerships, cashback for

communities, YouthLink Scotland and firefighters, who are now involved in work to divert youngsters from the temptations of a life of addiction or crime. They and many other volunteers are all involved in making our communities safer and all assist community policing.

In addition, mainstream police work is helping directly to make our communities safer places. That is self-evident. As was highlighted in *The Herald* this Monday, the persistent offender programme identifies persistent offenders and encourages them to enter programmes to tackle addiction problems while warning them that, if they do not, their already lengthy community sentences might involve periods of imprisonment. Detective Chief Superintendent John Carnochan and the violence reduction unit get in among gangs and peel off the ringleaders. That is excellent and, perhaps, pioneering work; it all helps to make our communities safer places.

I will mention some of the comments that were made in the debate. There was consensus that it is not necessarily possible, sensible or useful to define community policing. Many concerns were expressed about abstraction—Bill Aitken, Paul Martin and Michael Matheson mentioned that. I noticed, in paragraph 155 of the report, that Chief Constable Stephen House specifically addressed that and talked about a red-circling approach. As many members said, community police officers may be the first officers to be withdrawn to go on patrol and for emergency response work, because we must ensure that we have the response capability to tackle emergencies. Under that red-circling approach, they should at least patrol in the areas in which they are employed as community police officers. There is much to be said for that approach. I know that all members explicitly said that those are operational policing matters. None of us would want to and none of us thinks that it is correct to micromanage chief constables in deploying officers.

I know from my meetings with Northern Constabulary that it is pleased with the impact of the summary justice reforms on police time. John Lamont mentioned that issue. Northern Constabulary is already seeing the benefits of police officers spending less time hanging around and waiting in courts, probably not to be called as witnesses by people who are what Robert Brown and I were in our previous lives. Clients can decide, perhaps advisedly, to plead guilty at the last moment and everybody in the waiting room will disperse, having wasted a day, if not longer than that. The summary justice reforms are coming through and are tackling the police time problem that members have identified.

Robert Brown referred to visiting Tulliallan. I was proud to make a speech at the passing-out parade

there. I admit that that is one of the few speeches that I get to make from a platform—that added a certain piquancy to the occasion. Like Robert Brown, I was proud to see the calibre of the recruits who had undergone the excellent training that is given there, and was impressed to learn on that day that should Tulliallan fulfil its schedule, 1,000 extra recruits will be put through training than were put through in the previous year. That in itself is surely a marvellous achievement. I did not get any complaints from any of the trainers there about a lack of capacity; rather, the message that I got was, “We are up for this. We think that the policing policy is going in the right direction. We’re doing a good job and we’ll carry on as before.”

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The minister should wind up.

**Fergus Ewing:** I commend the principles of being accessible, present and visible, communicating, consulting and supporting community activities in community policing engagement. Those involved in such policing should be able to play the role that we all wish to see them play in our communities, throughout Scotland.

16:47

**Bill Butler (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab):** My task is to close on behalf of the Justice Committee at the conclusion of a wide-ranging, detailed and reasoned debate on the committee’s report on its inquiry into community policing. As always, I shall strive to do so in a non-partisan fashion.

Community policing is an important and serious subject that is of considerable significance to all the communities throughout Scotland that members seek to serve. Members will recall that, in 2007, the Justice Committee conducted an inquiry into the effective use of police resources. In its report on that inquiry, the committee expressed its concern about

“the lack of a clear, commonly agreed definition of community policing among Scottish police forces and the Scottish Government.”

All members of the committee thought then that there was a need for a clear definition of community policing that would enable measurement and monitoring of its delivery and would allow a baseline figure of officers assigned to community policing roles to be established. That was the genesis of this report, which can be viewed as the second stage of our inquiry into policing and the effective use of police resources.

The cabinet secretary, Cathie Craigie, Bill Aitken, James Kelly, Richard Baker and Jackson Carlaw—in fact, just about all members who spoke—touched on an issue that has excited a degree of controversy since the beginning of this

parliamentary diet. I am trying to put things in a non-partisan way. I refer, of course, to the recruitment of additional police officers at a level that would allow forces to meet effectively all their current commitments, including enhanced community policing. A glance back at the *Official Report* of the debate that was held on 16 April 2008 demonstrates that that aspect of the debate on policing is not new, and it continues to excite passions.

However, it would be churlish and unreasonable not to acknowledge that the Scottish National Party Government has made a degree of progress on the matter. Indeed, in his letter of 23 February to the convener of the Justice Committee, Bill Aitken, Mr MacAskill went into some detail on developments on police numbers. He claimed that “Scottish police numbers are now at record levels”

and that the Government is doing everything that it can

“to deliver 1,000 more officers by March 2011.”

I suggest that all members earnestly hope, for the sake of the safety of communities throughout Scotland, that the cabinet secretary’s optimism is not misplaced.

For my part, I will be cautious today and confine myself to the committee’s wise words at paragraph 335 of the report, which states:

“the Committee considers that ... If the Scottish Government is able to deliver the promised additional officers and forces are able to dedicate these to community policing then ... the delivery of community policing may be further improved.”

I am certain that no member could disagree with that. The proper resourcing of policing is, after all, central to the delivery of an improved range of police responses that more closely reflect the needs and wishes of people in our communities.

So far, I have concentrated on resources, which are an issue that, understandably, has exercised members. In the time remaining of my speech, I will mention some other recommendations in the inquiry report, which focus on the more philosophical matters that we considered. I turn to the issue of what the report refers to as

“a strict definition of community policing.”

Several members, including John Lamont, Stuart McMillan, Fergus Ewing and Bill Aitken, have said that a strict definition would be inappropriate. The evidence that the committee received convinced members that it would be of limited benefit to attempt to provide such a definition. It was clear to us that a one-size-fits-all model is wholly inappropriate. Police forces must have the flexibility to deliver community policing in a manner that recognises the particular nature of their force area. What works in rural Banff will have little

relevance to urban Blairdardie. Such flexibility also allows appropriate innovation, which is where community policing has added value.

I am pleased that the Scottish Government agrees with that approach—that is sensible and wholly welcome. Nevertheless, the committee was able, from evidence received and investigations made, to arrive at a unanimously agreed description of the key components of successful community policing—in other words, the principles of community policing. Those are laid out at paragraph 324. Members have mentioned several of those elements. I have heard no one disagree with the importance of having visible and accessible officers in the community who are readily identifiable. That wholly correct approach has been extolled by Robert Brown, Paul Martin, Bill Aitken, Andrew Welsh and James Kelly.

I know from my constituency that one of the main criticisms of community policing over the years has been the habit that some senior officers have of disregarding the advantages of continuity. The fact is that, when they have a local problem that requires police assistance or intervention, people in our communities are more comfortable dealing with someone whom they know by sight and name and whom they have grown to trust. Rapid turnover of police personnel in a community makes successful community policing much harder. That is why, although I welcome Mr MacAskill’s agreement with the key elements of community policing as outlined in our report, I confess that I am a bit disappointed by the Government’s response to the recommendation that community police officers should be in post for at least two years, which is merely to state:

“This is an operational matter for the police forces to consider.”

That response is somewhat anodyne and uncharacteristically bland, an epithet that is not usually employed to describe either the cabinet secretary or Mr Ewing.

I ask the Government to be a degree or two bolder on the issue of tenure. Of course the committee is not asking the Government to interfere directly in operational matters or, as the cabinet secretary rather quaintly put it, to “micromanage” the police. However, we are demanding that the Government give a clear lead in this regard. The ministerial team would be well advised to heed the wise words of Sir Ronnie Flanagan, Her Majesty’s chief inspector of constabulary, who said when he appeared before the committee:

“we should value neighbourhood policing.”

He added that the superintendent or chief superintendent, or the sergeants or constables

“should not be abstracted for at least two years.”—[*Official Report, Justice Committee, 24 June 2008; c 944.*]

There are other important recommendations in the report that I do not have time to go into but which other members have rightly highlighted. Those include the need for specific training to be delivered nationally, which was mentioned, quite rightly, by the cabinet secretary and by my colleague James Kelly, and the need to measure success at a local level, both qualitatively and quantitatively, which the committee convener and the cabinet secretary mentioned—I welcome the Government’s development of the Scottish policing performance framework in that regard. The absolute necessity for civic engagement, partnership working and community consultation was mentioned by many members, including my colleague Cathie Craigie, who made specific reference to the success of operation fleet in Cumbernauld.

The report is worth while and I am pleased that the Government has accepted the majority of its recommendations. Michael Matheson was right to say that successful community policing is not a soft option; it is in fact what our communities demand and what people want. It is a mixture of visible policing, intelligent policing and reactive policing. If it is properly developed and resourced, it will create safer communities throughout Scotland. That is a worthy objective.

## Business Motion

**The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson):** The next item of business is consideration of business motion S3M-3520, 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 4 March 2009

2.30 pm	Time for Reflection
<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
<i>followed by</i>	Stage 1 Debate: Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Bill
<i>followed by</i>	Legislative Consent Motion: Policing and Crime Bill - UK Legislation
<i>followed by</i>	Business Motion
<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
5.00 pm	Decision Time
<i>followed by</i>	Members’ Business

Thursday 5 March 2009

9.15 am	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
<i>followed by</i>	Scottish Labour Party Business
11.40 am	General Question Time
12 noon	First Minister’s Question Time
2.15 pm	Themed Question Time Finance and Sustainable Growth
2.55 pm	Local Government and Communities Committee Debate: National Planning Framework 2
<i>followed by</i>	Legislative Consent Motion: Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Bill - UK Legislation
<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
5.00 pm	Decision Time
<i>followed by</i>	Members’ Business

Wednesday 11 March 2009

2.30 pm	Time for Reflection
<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
<i>followed by</i>	Stage 3 Proceedings: Damages (Asbestos-related Conditions) (Scotland) Bill
<i>followed by</i>	Business Motion
<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
5.00 pm	Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business  
 Thursday 12 March 2009  
 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  
 Europe, External Affairs and  
 Culture;  
 Education and Lifelong  
 Learning  
 2.55 pm Stage 3 Proceedings: Health  
 Boards (Membership and  
 Elections) (Scotland) Bill  
*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions  
 5.00 pm Decision Time  
*followed by* Members' Business—[Michael  
 McMahon.]

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

16:56

**Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green):** Thank you, Presiding Officer, but I do not think that I will need them all. I welcome the proposal to make time available next week for a committee debate on the Local Government and Communities Committee's report on national planning framework 2 and I welcome the work that three committees have done to contribute to the scrutiny of the framework.

It is important that we have the chance to debate the report, but I want to raise a wider question about the parliamentary process for considering the national planning framework before we agree to the committee debate taking place. I want to ask whether and how the Parliamentary Bureau considered that in bringing the business motion to the Parliament.

The Planning etc (Scotland) Act 2006 places this responsibility on ministers:

"In preparing or revising the framework, Scottish Ministers are to have regard to ... any resolution ... of ... the Scottish Parliament".

During the Communities Committee's scrutiny of the Planning etc (Scotland) Bill, there was a lot of debate about the extent to which ministers should be bound by Parliament's view. I might have wished to go further than this, but the whole committee agreed with the recommendation in paragraph 271 of its stage 1 report on the bill, which called on the Executive

"to ensure that the draft National Planning Framework is the subject of a debate in the Parliament on a substantive motion to allow a full exchange of views on its contents."

The Government at the time disagreed with that recommendation perhaps because it did not accept my argument that, particularly in a period of minority Administration—should one ever arise—Parliament's word on the document, which has a substantial impact on communities throughout Scotland, should be final. It is even possible that the ministers of the day have had time to reflect on and reconsider that view.

These issues will of course be explored in more depth during the debate on the Local Government and Communities Committee's report. However, before we vote on the business motion, I would like clarification of whether we will have a further opportunity to consider a substantive motion, in Government time, on the contents of national planning framework 2 and confirmation that NPF 2 will not be adopted in a final form before we have that opportunity.

16:59

**Brian Adam (Aberdeen North) (SNP):** Mr Harvie is of course entitled to raise these matters but, on 25 November—prior to the NPF 2 document being laid in December—the Parliamentary Bureau agreed how the Parliament would scrutinise the document. It was agreed that the Parliamentary Bureau would set aside time in the business programme for a debate on the lead committee's report within the required timescale and that the lead committee's report and the *Official Report* of the debate would form the Parliament's response to Scottish ministers. As convener of one of the committees that contributed to the lead committee's report, Mr Harvie is aware of the process that was agreed, of which the committee debate next week is part. Yesterday, Mr Harvie requested a Government debate on NPF 2, and he repeated that request today. I have agreed to raise the matter with the Minister for Parliamentary Business and the cabinet secretary.

**The Presiding Officer:** The question is, that motion S3M-3520, in the name of Bruce Crawford, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to.*

## Parliamentary Bureau Motion

**The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson):** The next item of business is consideration of a Parliamentary Bureau motion. I ask Michael McMahon to move motion S3M-3521, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on the designation of the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee as the lead committee in consideration of the Arbitration (Scotland) Bill at stage 1.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees that the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the Arbitration (Scotland) Bill at Stage 1.—[*Michael McMahon.*]

17:00

**Iain Smith (North East Fife) (LD):** I will speak against the referral motion to designate the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee as the lead committee in consideration of the Arbitration (Scotland) Bill. I stress that, although I am the committee's convener, I am not speaking on behalf of the committee, which has no formal position on the matter.

I feel that important points of principle and procedure need to be put on the record. Under standing orders, the Parliamentary Bureau has no power to designate the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee as the lead committee on the bill. Rule 9.6.1 says clearly that

"Once a Bill has been printed, the Parliamentary Bureau shall refer it to the committee within whose remit the subject matter of the Bill falls."

The committee's remit is

"To consider and report on the Scottish economy, enterprise, energy, tourism and all other matters falling within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth".

By no definition does the bill fall within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth.

The bill was introduced by the Cabinet Secretary for Justice, Kenny MacAskill. The Minister for Community Safety, Fergus Ewing, took day-to-day responsibility for it. Those ministers have been supported by a bill team and policy officials from the directorate-general justice and communities. I understand that the intention is to ask Jim Mather to take the bill through the committee, but that does not change the fact that it is a justice bill. As Barack Obama said,

"You can put lipstick on a pig; it's still a pig."

I do not dispute that the bill might bring economic benefits, but that does not make it an economy bill. By that argument, any bill that brought economic benefits—I hope that most

legislation would be intended to do so—would fall within the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee's remit. It is clear that that would be nonsense.

On procedure, guidance for conveners and bureau members makes it clear that, if remits overlap—I dispute that in this case—the Minister for Parliamentary Business and his office are responsible for discussing the matter with the relevant committees' conveners. Up to this moment, the minister has made no attempt to discuss the matter with me one to one, or together with the Justice Committee's convener.

I urge the Parliament to reject the motion and I urge the bureau to do what standing orders require, which is to refer the bill to the committee in whose remit it falls—the Justice Committee.

17:03

**Brian Adam (Aberdeen North) (SNP):** It is correct to say that justice ministers and officials developed the bill. The bill will restate, clarify and modernise arbitration law, but it will also support the Government's targets of achieving sustainable economic growth and making Scotland an attractive place in which to do business. Iain Smith referred to rule 9.6.1 of standing orders, but he did not say that the rule goes on to state:

"Where the subject matter of the Bill falls within the remit of more than one committee the Parliament may, on a motion of the Parliamentary Bureau, designate one of those committees as the lead committee."

The process by which such matters are determined is that the Parliament's business team makes recommendations to the bureau for consideration. In January, the team recommended that two committees were appropriate for considering the bill and left it to the bureau to decide which of the two should consider the bill.

As for the reason for referring the bill to the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee, it is fair to say that it is imperative that methods are available to business to facilitate the speedy, effective and just resolution of disputes at an economically viable cost. The bill will assist companies in Scotland to resolve disputes privately and more quickly than through the public courts.

It is hoped that the modernisation and reform of the situation in Scotland will go some way towards stemming the current flow of arbitral business from Scotland to England and will attract international business to Scotland. It may also encourage more industries, professions and trades to adopt their own low-cost arbitration schemes, such as the one that is currently used by the Association of British Travel Agents. For those reasons, the Government argues that the purpose of the bill



falls within the remit of the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee.

The rules do not require the Government to approach the committee convener in such instances. Indeed, they make clear that this is a matter for the bureau. After the introduction of the bill, in line with standing order 9.6.1, the business team prepared a paper, to which I referred earlier. The paper stated clearly that the bill falls within the remits of both the Justice Committee and the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee. To emphasise the economic importance of the bill, and after discussion with the other parties, the Government agreed that a finance minister, Mr Mather, should be responsible for steering the bill through the Parliament. I recommend that the Parliament agrees to the motion that was so ably moved by Mr McMahon.

**Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD):** It is appropriate that there is some leeway in this area. However, does the member not accept that, although Mr Mather will take the bill forward, he will be supported by the justice department? The main thrust of the bill is reform of the courts, so it is evidently not a matter for the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee.

**The Presiding Officer:** Minister, you should close as soon as possible.

**Brian Adam:** Thank you for the promotion, Presiding Officer; I hope that the First Minister is listening.

I accept absolutely that the bill could have gone to either committee; that is clear from the business team's recommendations. I acknowledge that justice officials were involved in the process, but a finance minister will now lead on the bill. Other parties are content with that; I am disappointed that the Liberal Democrats do not appear to be.

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

## Decision Time

17:07

**The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson):** There are three questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that motion S3M-3621, in the name of Margaret Mitchell, on behalf of the Equal Opportunities Committee, on unpaid carers, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament notes evidence gathered by the Equal Opportunities Committee on unpaid carers at its meetings on 25 March and 7 October 2008, which highlighted that there were around 660,000 unpaid carers in Scotland, a figure that represented one in eight of the population; recognises the valuable contribution that unpaid carers make in saving the Scottish economy £7.6 billion a year; further notes that around 40% of unpaid carers surveyed reported that their access to services was poor or that available services did not meet their needs, and calls on the Scottish Government to take into consideration the evidence gathered when developing the forthcoming Scottish Government/COSLA carers strategy.

**The Presiding Officer:** The second question is, that motion S3M-3439, in the name of Bill Aitken, on behalf of the Justice Committee, on the report on its inquiry into community policing, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament notes the conclusions and recommendations contained in the Justice Committee's 18th Report, 2008 (Session 3): *Report on Inquiry into Community Policing* (SP Paper 155).

**The Presiding Officer:** The final question is, that motion S3M-3521, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on the designation of a lead committee, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

**For**

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)  
Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)  
Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)  
Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)  
Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)  
Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)  
Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)  
Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)  
Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)  
Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)  
Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)  
Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)  
Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)  
Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)  
Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)  
Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)

Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)  
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)  
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)  
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)  
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)  
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)  
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)  
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)  
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)  
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)  
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)  
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)  
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)  
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)  
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)  
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)  
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)  
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)  
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 McLaughlin, Anne (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)  
 McMahan, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)  
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)  
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)  
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)  
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)  
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)  
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)  
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 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)  
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)

Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)  
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)  
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)  
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)  
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

#### AGAINST

Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)  
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)  
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)  
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)  
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)  
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)  
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)  
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)  
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)  
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)  
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)  
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)  
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)  
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 99, Against 15, Abstentions 0.

#### *Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament agrees that the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the Arbitration (Scotland) Bill at Stage 1.

## Seabirds

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman):** The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S3M-2794, in the name of Nanette Milne, on seabirds. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

### *Motion debated,*

That the Parliament notes with concern recent data from the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) Scotland highlighting another terrible season for Scotland's breeding seabirds, notably Arctic skuas, Arctic terns and kittiwakes; is alarmed that many of our internationally important species have now suffered successive poor breeding seasons over a period of years, with evidence suggesting that the Scottish populations of these species are experiencing substantial declines; notes that Scotland is an internationally important breeding ground for seabirds, with spectacular coastal seabird colonies in areas such as north-east Scotland and the Northern Isles containing 45% of the European Union's breeding populations; further notes that seabird populations are a key health indicator for the marine environment as a whole, and considers that the forthcoming Scottish marine bill offers an opportunity to examine what can be done to address the catastrophic decline of our seabird populations.

17:09

**Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con):** I thank the members from all parties who have taken the time to sign my motion. I especially welcome the signature of the minister, Roseanna Cunningham, albeit that she signed it in her previous guise as a humble back bencher. I am sure that her elevation to the ministerial team has in no way diluted her interest in the subject, and I look forward to hearing her response at the end of tonight's debate. I also congratulate her on her promotion and wish her well as she gets to grips with her new role, appropriately during Scottish environment week.

Scotland can rightly be proud of its world-class bird-life and its reputation as an ornithologist's paradise. From the Highlands and Islands to the south-west and along the east coast, our small country is home to numerous rare and interesting species. Given our magnificent coastline and island habitats, it is no surprise that it is our seabirds for which Scotland is arguably most famous. From Sumburgh in the Shetlands to St Abbs in the Borders, and from Ailsa Craig in the west to the Isle of May in the east, our spectacular colonies house 45 per cent of the European Union's breeding seabirds and are of international importance. They also generate significant tourism revenue, as members who represent our coastal communities will know.

It is therefore a tragedy that the subject before us tonight has arisen. There have been not simply one but successive poor seasons for our seabirds

over a period of years. Populations can recover from one or two bad seasons, but it is clear that year after year of little or no breeding success will have a catastrophic impact on the survival of certain species.

The numbers involved are frightening. In some cases, we have witnessed the near collapse of colonies. At North Hill on Papa Westray in the Orkneys, more than 1,000 Arctic tern nests were abandoned early in the 2008 season, thereby failing to fledge a single chick. Also affected is the beautiful Arctic skua, which is a bird on the edge of its world range in Scotland. Reserves run by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds in the northern isles witnessed a 30 per cent decline in nesting pairs, with only three chicks fledging last year. Dr Douglas Gilbert, an RSPB ecologist, has said that the outlook is dire for the three worst affected species—the Arctic tern, the Arctic skua and the kittiwake.

Only yesterday, on the eve of this debate, the National Trust for Scotland, whose properties are home to nearly a fifth of Scotland's seabirds, warned that if current trends continue

"the evocative cries of the kittiwake, that much-loved feature of our coastal cliffs, could be consigned to folk memory".

Even the iconic puffin could be in trouble, with the population on the Isle of May declining by 28,000 pairs in a period of just five years.

We abuse our oceans at our peril, and the decline in seabirds is an indicator that all is not well with the ecosystem as a whole. The issue is complex, but it appears that the main problem is a shortage of food, which is driven by the warming of our seas, particularly in the north-east Atlantic, where winter temperatures tend to be higher and which appears to have seen the worst decline. According to the RSPB, the biomass of zooplankton there has dropped by 70 per cent. Not only has the abundance changed, but the prevalent cold-water species is progressively being replaced by a warmer water species.

Zooplankton are eaten by sand eel larvae, so they too have declined in number, and the birds that normally use them as their preferred diet are being forced to feed their young on pipefish instead. That often results in the chicks' choking on the bony pipefish or starving due to the low nutritional value of that alternative source of food. The following quote from the seabird ranger on St Kilda during the 2005 season underlines the terrible consequences:

"As soon as we entered the puffin colony, we could tell something was wrong. As we started to investigate marked burrows our hearts sank, as we were finding burrow after burrow with either no chick or a dead one lying in the nest. Pipefish were all over the ground throughout the colony,

and many of the burrows were full of piles of rotting pipefish which the young were unable to eat."

Adult birds, too, are suffering from a lack of food, and many are not attempting to breed at all.

After successive bad seasons, I fear that we could be in the early stages of an ecological catastrophe. All of us, perhaps, are guilty of not sitting up and taking notice sooner, but we still have the opportunity at least to attempt to do something.

The marine environment is clearly sensitive to climate change. We will need to take a strong and sustainable approach in the Climate Change (Scotland) Bill if we are to overcome the problem. The forthcoming marine bill, too, can be a vehicle to improve the resilience of the marine environment if it includes measures to protect some of our most precious wildlife from overexploitation and the damaging effects of development, thereby ensuring that all our marine resources are managed sustainably. Combating the warming of our seas is no easy task. In the short term, measures must be sought that give greater protection to fragile ocean habitats if we are to avoid the possibility of a future of lifeless seas and empty oceans.

The Government must work closely with everyone who has expertise in the subject to examine what can and must be done. Future generations will not forgive us if we simply preside over the loss of the great seabird colonies for which Scotland has long been renowned. It is our duty to ensure the preservation of those ecological treasures, and I look forward to hearing the views of members and the minister.

17:16

**Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP):**

I congratulate Nanette Milne on securing the debate on a motion that has the support of some 28 members of different parties in the Parliament, which demonstrates people's concern about the issue. I also congratulate Roseanna Cunningham on her much-deserved elevation.

There are approximately 8 million seabirds, of 25 species, in the United Kingdom. About half of them are in Scotland—indeed, for four species, some 95 per cent of the population of the British isles is in Scotland. Seabirds are a more significant issue in Scotland than they are in other parts of the British isles and Europe.

The census figures for 1970 to 2000 seem to suggest that there is less cause for concern, because populations that fell between 1970 and the 1987 census bounced back, but, as Nanette Milne said, the decline since 2000 has been much more serious. There are several major factors in the decline. Food availability is clearly a major

influence on breeding performance, as Nanette Milne said eloquently, and it is affected by, for example, the commercial fishery and climatic fluctuations. Two thirds of seabirds in the North Sea in summer are thought to feed to some extent on fishery waste, and the abundance of commercial fishing discards has been linked to population change in some species. Of course, commercial fisheries—in particular the sand eel fishery—can have a substantial negative impact on food availability.

Predation is an issue in areas where birds breed. Rats, feral cats and American mink can have a severe impact on breeding and adult survival. Over the years, many projects have attempted to eliminate rats and mink, and there have been attempts to cull or remove hedgehogs, which prey on eggs.

Drowning in nets is also a problem. Monofilament drift nets, which are no longer really used, caused a big decline in auk species such as puffins in the 1980s. Chronic oil pollution and illegal discharges have a greater impact than occasional accidental spills, and pesticide residues and other toxic chemicals have been implicated in population crashes. Work that has been done throughout the world has shown that the plastic bags that are discarded by the billion are found in high levels in dead seabirds, including in Scotland. Culling, egg collection, hunting for feathers and sport also have an impact.

We are not talking about just a Scottish problem. I lodged a motion on seabirds on 3 January 2008, not on Scottish seabirds but on the albatross, because 19 of the world's 22 albatross species are being driven to extinction, for example by long-line fishing, which is completely unnecessary. There has therefore been a severe impact on our seabirds across the world, but work is being done to try to improve the situation. For example, the sea eagle project, which is about returning our most magnificent bird of prey to our coasts, has had some success.

As has been said, we must emphasise in the forthcoming marine bill the need to consider seabirds and try to ensure that a significant amount of the additional 130,000 square miles of sea area that we will have to look after is dedicated not just to fishing but to conservation.

Climate change is of course a major issue. Everyone—from Scottish Natural Heritage to the RSPB—is concerned about changes to sea temperature and other issues that impact on biomass and zooplankton, which in turn impacts seriously on our seabird populations. We should remember that some species are more resilient than we perhaps imagine. For example, the significant long-term decline that we see in the

number of cliff-nesting birds is not always seen in species that nest elsewhere.

I add my support to that of others for Nanette Milne's motion. I hope that minds are focused on what we can do to improve the life expectancy of our seabird population and the health of breeding populations so that the populations that we see now will exist for future generations.

17:21

**Peter Peacock (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):**

As other members have, I welcome the opportunity that is offered by the debate and I support the motion, which is well crafted and captures the essence of the problem, as well as pointing to actions that could help in the future. I welcome, too, the Minister for Environment to her place. I bet that she is delighted that her boss has just left and that he is not looking over her shoulder at her first ministerial speech. It was very generous of him to show support, but to leave at the appropriate juncture.

The issue in the motion is important and deserves an airing in Parliament, so I am glad that Nanette Milne has secured the debate. As members may know, birdwatching is a passion of mine, and one that I share with a number of other members across the parties. I am a very amateur birdwatcher, but I derive pleasure from it, as do many hundreds of thousands of people in this country, which brings all sorts of economic benefits.

In my time, I have managed to live in Orkney for a couple of years, which has important colonies of seabirds that I enjoyed watching. Representing the Highlands and Islands region, I get the chance to travel to Shetland, Orkney, and the Western Isles and round the coasts of the Highlands, which are very important areas for bird populations. In the spring or summer, it is truly wondrous to see the sea cliffs in those areas occupied by seabirds and full of their raucous noise. There are kittiwakes, gannets, fulmars, guillemots, razorbills, puffins and the like, displaying and doing what they are supposed to do: raising the next generation of birds. That is what is under threat.

The recorded declines in numbers are alarming, although numbers fluctuate—as Kenny Gibson said—and there are good and bad years. However, the trends appear to be damaging. That is intrinsically alarming, but it has economic effects, too. People come to my part of the world to follow their birdwatching hobby and they spend their money there. There are, therefore, potential economic effects of bird population loss.

However, the motion points to a much more important reason why we should be concerned about our seabirds. The seabird population is a

good indicator of the health of the wider marine environment because it is visible and measurable; it is a good barometer of the changes that are taking place. It is not just about changes to the health of the sea and pollution, although Kenny Gibson rightly talked about the effect, for example, of plastics in the sea and it can affect birds.

The problem is also about the overexploitation of certain species in the sea. There are also bigger changes due to climate change. The seas are getting warmer and the species that birds feed on, such as sand eels, anchovies, squid and sardines, are moving progressively further north. Those fish on the move sometimes take the birds further from the bird colonies that depend on them, so greater journeys have to be made to secure food and there is less feeding of chicks, which can cause difficulty.

Changes in salinity levels near the top of the water have effects on the surface-feeding birds as well as on things that tend to live close to the surface. Falls in salinity levels affect the whole wider ecosystem at that level in the sea. Similarly, the changes in plankton that Kenny Gibson mentioned can, to an extent, lead to warmer water species taking over from cold-water species, which differ in their volume and mass—or biomass—and in their nutritional value. In addition, plankton blooms may be out of sync with the breeding cycle of the birds. Again, that has an impact on feeding.

Such changes can be seen not just on cliffs. When I was in Shetland about 18 months ago, I visited Mousa island, where there used to be a large tern colony. The colony still has a large number of adult terns, but there was not a single chick at the time of my visit. That is typical of what is happening the length and breadth of the north. The situation is very alarming.

It is easy to record what the problem is, but we also need to address what we need to do about it. Perhaps the minister can use some of her new-found influence in Government to try to make a difference. Let me mention four points quickly. First, we should increase our research to increase our understanding of what is happening. Secondly, we need to redouble our efforts under the Climate Change (Scotland) Bill to combat climate change so that we meet the 3 per cent target that was originally set out. Thirdly, we need to deal with commercial sand eel exploitation, which is carried out particularly by the Danish fleet. Such exploitation is not the only reason for the changes, but it adds to the problem. Finally, we should look at how we manage our inshore fisheries and consider the potential for marine protected areas in that context.

Scotland is internationally important for seabirds. I hope that, among her many priorities, the minister will give the matter attention and action.

17:26

**Ted Brocklebank (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** I, too, congratulate my colleague Dr Nanette Milne on securing this important debate, and I welcome the new minister to her portfolio. I look forward to robust exchanges of views, such as we have had in the past.

As one of those who were fortunate enough to be invited by the RSPB on its spring boat trips down the Forth to observe seabirds, I am delighted to say a few words in tonight's debate. In the part of Fife where I make my home, we are fortunate enough to have the Tentsmuir forest and adjacent sands, which are wonderful breeding grounds for terns and eider ducks. We also have the Isle of May a few miles off the Fife coast, which is, as Nanette Milne said, one of Europe's foremost breeding grounds for seabirds.

Here I have a confession to make: a misspent youth that included collecting birds' eggs. I have no excuses, other than that some of Scotland's foremost and renowned ornithologists began their careers in similar ways. As I scoured the local waterways and woodlands to add to my egg collection, how could I have known that I was embarking on a love affair with wild birds that would endure to this day? That love is shared by countless thousands, as Peter Peacock pointed out, and is worth millions of pounds to Scotland's tourism economy.

Of course, it is of concern that many of our coastal breeding species are declining, largely due to lack of food. As we have heard, warming of the North Sea has meant decreases in the sand eel population, which in turn seems to be responsible for the collapse of key seabird populations. The Climate Change (Scotland) Bill and the forthcoming marine bill offer opportunities to examine what can be done to address the problem. I hope that, with international co-operation—including suspension of industrial sand eel fisheries—our prolific seabird colonies can yet be restored.

Tonight, I want to talk briefly about an iconic seabird species—Kenny Gibson also mentioned it—that is bucking the trend by expanding from the remote west coast to the east of Scotland. What is more, this species contributes hugely to the tourism economies of Mull and Skye and could soon start to do the same along the east coast. White-tailed eagles, or sea eagles, were reintroduced from Norway in the 1970s. These magnificent birds were once indigenous to Scotland and are even larger than their cousins,

our native golden eagles. There are now 44 breeding pairs on the west coast. That is a hugely encouraging native population that seems set to grow. In 2007, the RSPB launched a project to reintroduce those magnificent predators to the east coast of Scotland. Around 100 sea eagle chicks are planned to be released over five years from sites up and down the east coast. Around 20 chicks have already been set free and another 20 will arrive from Norway in May of this year. Hopes are high that some of the birds that were originally released in 2007 might start mating this year or next.

To catch a glimpse of a sea eagle in flight is a breathtaking experience. Last year, Fife shopkeepers were fortunate enough to see a sea eagle swooping over a Kirkcaldy supermarket, and they have been regularly spotted at Tentsmuir in north-east Fife. Sightings have also been reported elsewhere in the area, including Loch Leven and the Isle of May.

When the east coast birds finally choose nesting sites, the plan is to select an observation hide so that the public can be encouraged to watch them. That could bring hosts of tourists, as it has done with the Mull observatory. Early indications are that the east coast birds are preying largely on geese and rabbits along the Tay and Eden estuary, with regular visits to parts of Perthshire, including Glenalmond and Loch Tay. So, not least from a tourism perspective, the minister and I will be hoping that these noble birds choose either of or both our constituencies to establish permanent breeding sites.

Complaints have been made about sea eagles preying on lambs, particularly around Gairloch in Wester Ross. A research project is under way to establish the truth about Gairloch. It is worth noting that when similar complaints were made on Mull, research established that although sea eagles do take lambs, the numbers had been very much overstated. Compensation is also paid where appropriate.

On the east coast, where sheep husbandry is different, there have been no complaints so far about lambs being taken. Of course, local RSPB managers on the ground react quickly to any complaints. Since the east coast is also a richer natural habitat, there are high hopes that the new colony will be even more successful than the one on the west coast. Although we should be aware of the problems that face our seabird flocks, predators such as sea eagles are minimal contributors to those problems, and it is gratifying that at least one seabird species appears to be facing a bright future.

17:31

**The Minister for Environment (Roseanna Cunningham):** I am pleased to be here for my debut performance as a new minister in the Government in response to my good friend Nanette Milne's motion. Earlier today, I was racking my brains trying to remember whether I had signed it. She has resolved that for me, but I fear that that might not be the only time that my back-bench activities and comments are referred to in the chamber. I expect that I shall have to get used to that.

I thank everyone for their congratulations; in turn, I congratulate Nanette Milne on securing the debate. As she rightly says, Scotland's marine environment is a wonderful resource and our seabird populations are a valuable part of that marine environment. The seabird populations are of European and global renown, and they attract visitors from all over the United Kingdom, Europe and the rest of the world. Peter Peacock made the point very well about how important they are. We tend to forget that our environment and the animals that exist there do not exist in vacuum; they are part and parcel of what makes this country what it is, and what makes it an attractive destination for people from around the world.

The Government shares the concerns about recent reports of yet another poor breeding season in 2008 for seabird populations. We are particularly concerned about the Arctic skua, the kittiwake and the Arctic tern. A great deal of valuable work is being carried out on RSPB reserves across Scotland—I echo Ted Brocklebank's appreciative comments about that. The Government and nature conservation agencies work closely with the RSPB to monitor seabirds, and a recent report highlights serious declines in 2008 in certain species that were surveyed by the RSPB. However, it is important to point out that that report also highlights the fact that some species—great skuas, gannets and cormorants—have increased in number. Peter Peacock talked about those fluctuations.

Ted Brocklebank also talked about the successful reintroduction of white-tailed sea eagles. However, if they start nicking people's sandwiches, we might get more than a few complaints, so we should hope that they are not interested in tuna fish and that they stick to rabbits.

The problem is that the fluctuations show the difficulty faced by the Government and nature conservation agencies in diagnosing the causes of decline in particular seabird species, because there is no obvious, across-the-board decline. Clearly, we need to take a careful look at the underlying reasons for all declines.

One of the key issues is the reduced availability of the preferred food source, which both Nanette Milne and Kenneth Gibson spoke about. The problem looks like it might come down to our old friend, climate change, and the impact of rising sea surface temperatures. In particular, birds that like sand eels, such as kittiwakes, are experiencing major problems because they are not getting their food supply in the summer months, which affects their ability to nest and rear their young. If they cannot get sand eels, they turn to pipefish, which simply do not give them the necessary nourishment. The situation is analogous to people trying to meet all their nutritional needs just by eating chips, which is simply not possible; the same is true of seabirds and pipefish.

The fact that seabirds live for a long time enables them to cope with poor breeding seasons, but what they are now experiencing goes beyond natural fluctuations; the present run of successive poor seasons is far more serious. The result is few chicks and low populations.

Scotland has a good track record of taking positive action to meet the needs of seabirds, but before I discuss what measures are being taken, I turn briefly to the issue of reduced discards. The evidence appears to show that discards artificially elevated seabird populations, so the fact that discards have been reduced might not be having a direct effect on population decline, notwithstanding the issue's importance in specific areas. We must be careful about the overall mix.

Peter Peacock mentioned sand eel fisheries. Examples of Scotland's good track record are the closure of the Wee Bankie sand eel fisheries off the east coast and the voluntary measures that have been taken around Shetland. However, despite those closures, seabird populations are still declining, which suggests that the issue is more complicated. That is where climate change rears its ugly head. We must continue to monitor sand eel populations, sea-surface temperatures and seabird populations.

**Christopher Harvie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP):** I have a brief but, I hope, helpful point of information.

This has been a fascinating debate, which has moved me greatly, but one area in which we in Scotland might, unfortunately, be profiting from what is happening is the process that is carried out at the Mossmorran plant in Fife whereby polypropylenes are refined out of North Sea gas. Given that polypropylenes are one of the major sources of the world's plastic bag population, it might be possible to put a bit of pressure or bring some influence to bear on the polypropylene producers so that some cash could be obtained for scientific research purposes.

**Roseanna Cunningham:** That is an extremely interesting suggestion. We are already making quite big inroads into the use of plastic carrier bags through a different form of action. It is important to involve the private sector when we can.

We are, of course, taking measures to tackle climate change—the Climate Change (Scotland) Bill is going through the Parliament. We are also working closely with Scottish Natural Heritage and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee to identify and designate special protection areas for seabird populations. A number of SPAs have been designated, others are being consulted on and we are working on the identification of further such areas.

However, discussion of potential SPAs is not always met with enthusiasm by local human populations. Explanation of how important seabirds are to us as human beings is part and parcel of the education that we must undertake; seabirds should not be seen as separate species that are of lesser relevance.

We realise that existing measures may not be enough to arrest the decline among iconic species. However, we are committed to safeguarding biodiversity and to protecting internationally renowned seabird populations. That will be part and parcel of our work on the forthcoming Scottish marine bill. That bill has been mentioned by a number of members so I will not go into it in great detail now. There will be more time in Parliament to discuss the bill and its relevance to seabird populations.

We are, of course, concerned about declining populations. Scotland is unique and has unique seabird populations. They act as indicators for much more than just sand eels; they are almost like canaries for the seas. We will have to keep a close eye on what is happening to them.

We will want to continue all the work that we are currently doing, expanding it where possible. That will be done through the marine bill and the Climate Change (Scotland) Bill. We value the contributions of all the Scottish and United Kingdom non-governmental organisations, such as the RSPB and Scottish Environment LINK. We are aware of the problem and are constantly on top of the measures that will be required in our efforts to fix the problems. The issue is very complicated, and I thank Nanette Milne for ensuring that it was brought before the Parliament.

*Meeting closed at 17:40.*



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